The Firstborn Birthright

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> Deuteronomy 21:15–17
> 15 If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the firstborn son be hers that was hated:
> 16 Then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn:
> 17 But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his.

In this Bible study the birthright stands central. It is a concept that plays an important role throughout the entire Bible. We are often inclined to see this concept as a line of descent, but in essence it concerns who will ultimately be the Heir of a new creation. Both kingship, priesthood and birthright find their ultimate fulfilment in our Lord Jesus Christ. Moreover it is explained how we as the Church of the firstborn have a share in that kingship and priesthood. How it is possible that the birthright is promised both in the Old Testament to Israel and in the New Testament to the Church, and how this finds its fulfilment, is likewise dealt with in this Bible study.

Introduction

The birthright plays an important role in biblical history. It is ultimately linked with the Lord Jesus Christ. In the New Testament He is explicitly

designated as the Firstborn on several occasions. For example, the Firstborn of the whole creation, the Firstborn from the dead, the firstborn Son of God. Another term that occurs is the Only-begotten Son of God. In practice it appears that these two expressions have the same meaning. Problems arise when the meaning of the words “firstborn” and “only-begotten” is not clear and the meaning is derived from the etymology (word derivation). A “firstborn” is then the one who was born first and “only-begotten” would then be the one who was born as the only one, without others being born. The one who is designated as “firstborn” has the highest inheritance right among the sons. He receives the indivisible possessions. In English the expression “firstborn” is applied to the one who was born first. That is not entirely wrong, but where birthright plays a role in the Bible, it often does not go to the one who was born first. The original Hebrew word for firstborn has no connection with the one who was born first. The same also applies to the more New Testament expression “only-begotten.” In the Old Testament we do not find this word in the translation, but it does occur there. That word gives the impression that it concerns the “one son,” whereby it is supposed that there are no other sons at all. When someone in the Bible is called the only son, it only means that this one or only son is the one who enjoys the special favour of the father. The term “only-begotten” has the meaning of “the unique,” “the incomparable” or “the beloved.” The son who is that receives the birthright from the father, so that the only-begotten son in practice is the same as the firstborn son. On occasion it is stated of the Lord Jesus Christ that He is the firstborn Son (Luke 2:7) or “the Firstborn of all creation” (Colossians 1:15). He is also spoken of as the only-begotten Son (John 3:16). Both terms are sometimes wrongly set against each other. One then thinks that if He is the only-begotten Son (in the sense of unique), He cannot be the Firstborn, for then there must be at least two. But only-begotten is in practice therefore the same as the firstborn. With this knowledge many problems are solved that we encounter in the New Testament concerning the word “only-begotten.”
There is a continuing line to be found in the Bible from Adam to the Lord Jesus Christ. One is inclined to see this as a line of descent. It appears, however, to be a line that is determined by the birthright. We shall in this Bible study first examine the concepts “firstborn” and “only-begotten” in order to know on what they are based. Later the Scripture passages will come up in which the birthright plays an important role. Then it will become evident that those Scripture passages under all circumstances are connected with the Lord Jesus Christ and with our own position as members of a Church of the firstborn that is written in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).

The Firstborn, only-begotten and only son
The expression “only-begotten” or “only son” is used and applied to Christ Himself. In all cases it is on the one hand connected with the birthright, on the other hand with being beloved. It concerns the One who is unique and who stands outside everything. Hence it can be translated as “lonely.” It

concerns the one who is nowhere to be compared and precisely for that reason this “lonely one” receives the birthright.

Zechariah 12:10

10 And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.

This is a statement that can only be applied to the Jewish people. It also applies to Israel, but in particular to the Jewish people. It has no application to the Church and also not to the ten tribes. It is expressly the house of David and thereby Judah is meant. That is why Jerusalem is also emphatically mentioned as the capital of Judah, as the place where the throne of David should stand. The Spirit of grace that is promised is the Holy Ghost of promise. The Lord comes back to it later. That outpouring of the Holy Ghost is in fact nothing other than a statement about the coming again of Christ. Not visibly, but invisibly and also not among His own but in His own. We find this again in:

John 14:16–18

16 And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever;

17 Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

18 I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.

The Lord announces that the Spirit would come from the Father, after which He says that He would not leave them comfortless. Afterwards it should follow that He would send the Holy Ghost, but He says that He comes again to the apostles. The Lord announces that He would go away, but He also announces that He would be and remain with them until the end of the age. We usually understand by the coming again of Christ His appearing at the end of the seventieth week of Daniel. The Lord Himself then appears to those who have repented and call on His Name. They also receive the Holy Ghost on that occasion, so that the Lord would be with them and in them. If moreover this prophecy from Zechariah 12:10 and also from Joel 2:28 ff. will in the future be fulfilled to Israel and in particular to the house of David, then this happens at the bodily coming again of Christ. That it is spoken here about His bodily coming again can also be deduced from the fact that the Holy Ghost would come and they would be able to look upon Him. Then it is spoken here about “an only son.” If this stood in the New Testament, then it would be spoken about the “only-begotten son.” This word “only” is translated in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) with “prototokos.” That means “firstborn.” Since this concerns the Old Testament that is translated directly from the Hebrew, that word is not there and it is translated with “only son.” It is, however, completely the same as the only-begotten son. Of that it is stated in Zechariah 12:10 that at His coming again they will mourn for Him, probably on the occasion of His appearing on the Mount of Olives, as for a firstborn. If we now set these

two sentences underneath each other, we see that “mourn” and “mourning” correspond with “bitterly lament” and “bitterly laments,” after which the conclusion can be drawn that “only son” and “firstborn” also have the same meaning. They are indeed different words, but bitterly lamenting is also a different word from mourning. So it is also with only son and firstborn. The problem with these words is that we do not use them in our everyday language and therefore we derive their meaning from the composition, the etymology. If it should have another meaning or derivation, it is connected with the concept of blessing. It could then be translated as “the blessed one.” Other aspects of the word are then, however, lost.
The firstborn is the one with the highest inheritance right and thereby the term only son is also explained. The term does not mean that there are no others, but that there may well be others who play no significant role. They stand, namely, on a different level from this son and this only son is so called because he is unique in his qualities. There may be others, but this one is unique. You must imagine that you have seven children, of whom you say of one that he is unique, different from the other six. Ultimately there is a simple explanation for this: the only son is the unique one, because he is appointed as firstborn and the father gives him the birthright. In the case of the Lord Jesus (that is what it is about here after all) that is a clear matter. Many people were called children or sons of God, in the sense that everything they are and have they originally received from God. Thus Adam was also called the son of God and his sons likewise. The Lord Jesus, however, is called in particular the Son of God, because He is separate. He is unique, He stands out. The reason for that is His perfect faith. There will undoubtedly be still more special things to say about Him, but Scripture says that it concerns His faith. That He completely believed and trusted in the Word of God. On the ground of His special faith God appointed Him as Firstborn and ensured that He was also literally the First who rose from the dead. He opened the womb by which through His resurrection from the dead He became the Firstborn, received the birthright and thereby became the firstborn Son of God. There will be more, but He would be the First. And because He is the First, He is the Unique, the Incomparable, the Only and even the Beloved, for that meaning is also attached to it.
In the New Testament these terms are applied to Christ on several occasions. The term firstborn has a more legal content. The word only-begotten has in principle the same meaning, but has an emotional value that lies somewhere else. It is a word that speaks more about affection, about the love of God for His only Son. In that connection He is called the Only in the sense of the Beloved. That is also the reason why He was appointed as Firstborn. In practice the words have no different meaning. They only carry a different emotional value. This is found among other places in Genesis.
Genesis 22:1–2a
1 And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am.
2 And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest…

This is the first place in the Bible where the term occurs and it at the same time explains what the meaning is. In the first place it is said: take your son, your only one. After that it is stated that it concerned Isaac. Isaac, however, was not the only son of Abraham and also not the first. Ishmael was the first and there were therefore at any rate two sons. Isaac is nevertheless called the firstborn, because he received the birthright above Ishmael. Here, however, he is also expressly called the only one. It says: take your son, your only one whom you love. Immediately the emotional value of loving is attached to this word. Every other time when we come across the expression “the only one,” certainly in connection with the only son, we must read that as the beloved son. In the New Testament we find a few times the statement from God concerning the Lord Jesus: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17, Matthew 17:5, Mark 1:11, Luke 3:22). That statement means nothing other than: this is My Firstborn Son, to Him I give the birthright. That is the ultimate thrust of it. The same statement was made at His baptism (Matthew 3:17), which is a picture of His resurrection. The other occasion was at the transfiguration on the mountain (Matthew 17:5). That is likewise a picture of His resurrection and ascension. The term Beloved Son therefore has in practice the meaning of the only son, but thereby also of firstborn, the one who would receive the birthright.
The continuation of the story is well known. Abraham had to offer Isaac and in that connection it says in:

The Birthright
Genesis 22:12
12 And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.
Here again it speaks of “thy only son.” He was the only one because the birthright had been promised to him.
Genesis 21:12
12 And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called.
On this occasion Isaac is designated by God Himself, by the driving out of Ishmael, as the firstborn son. Isaac is the one who has the birthright from Abraham. That is why it also speaks of “thy son, thine only son.” In Genesis 22 we already find that this firstborn would be destined for God. That regulation came a few hundred years later under the law and moreover it officially concerned “whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast: it is mine” (Exodus 13:2). Here it concerns the fact that these two sons are the sons of Abraham. Isaac was, although he was the second son, the first from Sarah. That is what it is about. The law did not yet exist, but it is nevertheless applied here. The Lord then asks Abraham to offer his son. He actually does so.

Genesis 22:16
16 And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because

thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son.

In the above verses the meaning of the term is clear enough. We must hold to that throughout the whole Bible. Also in:

Judges 11:34

34 And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances: and she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter.

Judges 11:39–40

39 And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man. And it was a custom in Israel,

40 That the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year.

The daughter of Jephthah was alone, but that is not the primary meaning. That is again the beloved. She was so beloved because she was the only one. You know how the history continues. Jephthah would give to the Lord the first thing that came to meet him as soon as he returned home. He also had to do that. She was devoted to the Lord. Which means that she knew no man. She was not killed, but separated from the people and spent the rest of her life in loneliness. Here it therefore concerns an only child, in this case a daughter, but in the same position of firstborn. Afterwards we no longer come across the term until the Psalms, where it is connected with the Lord Jesus.

Psalm 22:20–21

20 Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog.

21 Save me from the lion’s mouth: for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns.

The sword is a picture of death, as is the dog. It is not for nothing that a dog is an unclean animal. It is a picture of death. The beast is called Cerberus, the hell-hound, which is even said to have had three heads. “Deliver my soul from the sword” means: deliver me from death or out of death. “My darling” has the same meaning as “my soul” and means “me.” “Darling” is the translation of the same word “only,” as we encountered it earlier. It should therefore have been translated here as: deliver me, the only one, or: deliver me, the beloved, from death. If he is the beloved or would be that, he appeals to the power of God to deliver him from the power of the dog, the sword, the lion’s mouth or the horns of the unicorns (verse 21). It concerns the fact that the only one, the lonely one, the son, would be delivered from death. Here the expression is applied to Christ. Through the Septuagint the word “lonely one” should be translated as “only-begotten.” It is completely the same. This is found again in:

Psalm 25:16

16 Turn thee unto me, and have mercy upon me; for I am desolate and afflicted.

“Lonesome” here also means the only one. There is no one comparable. In so far as these are words of David, we must establish that he was not an only child and in that sense not only. He was, however, of all his brothers

the one who was chosen by God Himself for the kingship. In the second instance the words, just as in Psalm 22, are applied to the Lord Jesus Himself. He is the Only One, Afflicted, and the intention is that that Afflicted One would be delivered from death and receive mercy. It is a completely biblical truth that the Lord Jesus Himself also received grace. He was made sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21) and the sinner should die (Ezekiel 18:4). That is normally the end of the story, but He was shown grace and God raised Him from the dead. That, however, had another basis, for resurrection, new birth or eternal life is received on the ground of faith. He bore our sins and therefore He died, but He was a believer and what a One! That is why He was raised. Because His faith was incomparable with the faith of any man, He was the Only One and God raised His Son, the Only One, the Beloved, from the dead. As the First, so that it could thereby be established for ever that He is the Firstborn. That means: the One who was exceedingly exalted and to whom a name above every name was given (Philippians 2:9). His resurrection too was on the ground of faith and therefore out of grace. He is thereby seated on the throne of grace and through Him we receive grace. In Ephesians 1:3 it says that we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. One of those blessings is that we have been shown grace. That means that He has received grace and we, who have become partakers of Him, who have become one with Him, have become partakers of His grace. In Ephesians 1:6 it says that we have been shown grace in the Beloved. The Beloved is a reference to the Only One and also to why He was that Only One and Incomparable. That was namely on the ground of His faith. In the expression that we have been shown grace in the Beloved it is established that we have received grace out of His faith. It could also have said that we have been shown grace in the Only-begotten, for that has in practice the same thrust.

> Psalm 35:17
> 17 Lord, how long wilt thou look on? rescue my soul from their destructions, my darling from the lions.

“My soul” corresponds with “my darling” and means “me.” You can therefore read: “rescue me from their destructions, rescue me (the only one or only-begotten) from the lions,” whereby the lions are again a picture of death. Here again it is the beloved who prays for deliverance and on the ground of the fact that he was the beloved, he was appointed as son. In that way those two concepts, beloved and son, are connected to each other.

> Psalm 68:6–7
> 6 A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation.
> 7 God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains: but the rebellious dwell in a dry land.

The translation “solitary” here seems very appropriate since it concerns those who are alone and are placed in a family. On the other hand it can just as well be translated with “the beloved ones,” namely God who sets His beloved ones in a family and who brings out those who are bound with chains (captivity). We recognise two applications of this statement. The

one is the application to Israel in the future, when those who are in captivity, who are forsaken but nevertheless beloved, are gathered and brought into the house of Israel, the land of Canaan. On the other hand it is a statement about the believers of today who are solitary, who have gone outside the camp, into captivity, bound and strangers from the commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:12). They are set in a family whereby the house of God is formed by the Church (Hebrews 3:6; 1 Timothy 3:15). The question now is whether the term “solitary” here again has the meaning of firstborn. That is indeed the case. Where it is applied to the Church we also speak of a Church of the firstborn. Where it is applied to Israel, it is indeed true that Israel would receive the birthright. The meaning is therefore certainly behind it, although I must add that it is not found on the surface here.

There are still four Scripture passages in the Old Testament where the term is used.

> Proverbs 4:1–3
> 1 Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding.
> 2 For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law.
> 3 For I was my father’s son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother.

It speaks about the tender son and the only son. “Tender” means: the gentle or the meek. Solomon received that birthright because he was tender. What else can that mean than that he had a tender disposition? He allowed himself to be instructed. In the highest instance this means that we should allow ourselves to be instructed by the teaching of God, namely the Torah, the law or the Word of God. Where we allow ourselves to be instructed by God, we have a share in Christ and in His Life, for Christ is the Wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24). Meekness in Scripture is a synonym for the willingness to believe, to listen or to submit. So it is with the Lord Jesus. He was meek, believing and therefore in the New Testament He also makes the statement: “Blessed are the meek” (Matthew 5:5). Solomon was not an only child. He was, however, the first from his mother. His mother ensured that Solomon came to the throne. He was, however, not the progenitor of the Lord Jesus. That thought is a stubborn misunderstanding. The kings who until now have been from the house of David were all from Solomon. I mean thereby the two-tribe kingdom. This went on until Jeconiah, but he died childless. This was in the captivity and afterwards no one has sat on the throne any more. There were indeed heirs to the throne, but they were heirs through the brother of Solomon, uncle Nathan. That is again a beautiful illustration of how that birthright nevertheless always ends up somewhere else. Not with the first, Solomon in this case, but with the second.

What I now quote about Solomon and Nathan is exactly the same as what happened with the two and the ten tribes. The history continued through Solomon and afterwards the kingship disappeared and no one has sat on the throne any more. The inheritance right of the throne came to the family of Nathan, but they did not sit on the throne. That will still happen in the future, when the Lord Jesus will sit on the throne. The same

happened with the history of Israel. That continued with the two-tribe kingdom, the Jewish people, and afterwards the history stopped. That more or less died out at the first coming of Christ and in our days we no longer know Israel, at least no “ammi” (my people) according to the flesh. Nevertheless God’s work is continued on the other branch of the family. That is us in our days, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17). In the future we shall sit with Christ on the throne, whereby the line from Nathan and the line from the ten tribes of Israel come together.

> 1 Chronicles 29:1–2
> 1 Furthermore David the king said unto all the congregation, Solomon my son, whom alone God hath chosen, is yet young and tender, and the work is great: for the palace is not for man, but for the LORD God.
> 2 Now I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God the gold for things to be made of gold, and the silver for things of silver, and the brass for things of brass, the iron for things of iron, and wood for things of wood; onyx stones, and stones to be set, glistering stones, and of divers colours, and all manner of precious stones, and marble stones in abundance.

The word “alone” in this text is a different word from the one discussed earlier, but with the same thrust. Here it concerns the building of the temple by Solomon. That is a picture of the building of the Church in our days by Christ. David hereby also announces his successor. Not so much on the throne, for that comes only later.

> Jeremiah 6:26
> 26 O daughter of my people, gird thee with sackcloth, and wallow thyself in ashes: make thee mourning, as for an only son, most bitter lamentation: for the spoiler shall suddenly come upon us.

Here it is spoken to the Jewish people (possibly to Jerusalem), whereby the downfall of Jerusalem is announced. The thought is that the only son will die. Here the term is applied to Israel, to the people as such.

> Amos 8:10
> 10 And I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; and I will bring up sackcloth upon all loins, and baldness upon every head; and I will make it as the mourning of an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day.

There will be mourning because of the downfall of Israel, because of the judgment that the Lord would bring upon Israel. These are not pleasant prophecies. Nevertheless in the prophecy it is not only spoken about the downfall of the people, but at the same time it is spoken about that only son. That was Israel among the nations of the earth. For Israel was called to the birthright.

The term “only-begotten” we find for the first time in Luke 7, but not in connection with the Lord Jesus.

> Luke 7:11–12
> 11 And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people.
> 12 Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there

was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her.

In the first place this young man of Nain is a picture of the Lord Jesus Himself. In the second place it is a picture of how the Church comes into being in our days. The son is the son of his mother, whereby the mother is a picture of Israel. The son is ultimately, at least after he has been raised, a picture of the Church. Before the raising he is a picture of the ten tribes of Israel: dead, lost, gone, carried to the grave. It is also stated that he was a young man of Nain and we also find that in the Old Testament. That young man was from Ephraim, namely Joshua, the son of Nun (Nain is the Greek version of the name Nun). Joshua was that young man, the one who would succeed Moses. Joshua from Nun, descendant of Ephraim, is a picture of Christ especially in our present time. Christ, the Church and Ephraim are hereby connected with one another. It is pictured how the ten tribes of Israel come to life again, but the thought is that the Church comes forth from them. The mother is Israel, the dead son is a picture of the ten tribes that are raised and from which the Church arises. The son is called the only-begotten son of his mother. That he was thereby beloved is clear enough. In particular, however, it concerns the birthright again here, for that is attached to it.

The Birthright

Luke 8:40–42

40 And it came to pass, that, when Jesus was returned, the people gladly received him: for they were all waiting for him.

41 And, behold, there came a man named Jairus, and he was a ruler of the synagogue: and he fell down at Jesus’ feet, and besought him that he would come into his house:

42 For he had one only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she lay a dying. But as he went the people thronged him.

This only daughter is a picture of the two tribes of Israel, the Jewish people, the daughter of the ruler of the synagogue. It is a purely Jewish context, while the only son from the previous chapter is a picture of the ten tribes. Those ten tribes, incidentally, we meet again here in the woman who had had an issue of blood for twelve years and was healed.

Luke 9:28–35

28 And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray.

29 And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering.

30 And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias:

31 Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.

32 But Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep: and when they were awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him.

33 And it came to pass, as they departed from him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three

tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias: not knowing what he said.
34 While he thus spake, there came a cloud, and overshadowed them: and they feared as they entered into the cloud.
35 And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him.

This is a picture of the glorification of the Church together with Christ. Then the casting out of the evil spirit from the lunatic boy is described. That is a picture of Israel in the future and more particularly a picture of the Jewish people. The thought is that the glorification on the mountain is a picture of our dispensation and that the healing of the lunatic boy is a picture of the next dispensation. Our dispensation stands in relation to the ten tribes (the Church) and the next dispensation to the two tribes (Israel). Of both it is said that they are only-begotten.

John 1:14
14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

Here the term “only-begotten” is explicitly applied to the Lord Jesus Christ and in particular to His resurrection. That is not generally known, but it is nevertheless so. The statement: “…we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father…” is a statement about the risen Christ and possibly about the Christ whom John saw on the occasion of the transfiguration on the mountain. Peter speaks about it in that way in 2 Peter 1. He too says that they beheld a glorified Christ and he bases that on the appearing in glory of Christ on the mount of transfiguration. John explains this statement later in 1 John, his first epistle. That statement about the Only-begotten of the Father in John 1:14 is a statement about the risen Christ, who at His resurrection was appointed as Firstborn. Here too the expressions as it were merge into one another. The meaning remains completely the same.

John 1:18
18 No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

That is a statement that corresponds with the other statements in the epistles, in which it is said that Christ is the brightness of God’s glory and the express image of His person (Hebrews 1:3). Here John puts it somewhat differently, but the thought remains the same. The invisible God expresses Himself in Christ, in particular in the risen Christ. Here too the term is used in the same way. It could also have said “the firstborn Son.”

John 3:14–16
14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:
15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.
16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

The intention is that we should believe in the One whom God has raised from the dead. The only-begotten Son in verse 16 is the same as the Son of man who was lifted up in verse 14 and who was pictured by the serpent in the wilderness that was lifted up. By that it is simply meant that that Only-begotten Son is the Lifted-up One: the lifted-up Serpent, the lifted-up Son of man, the Risen One. Here too it is a statement about the birthright of Christ. In Romans 8:29 we read: that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. For if we believe in Him, we are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ and therefore brethren of Christ, for which reason He is not ashamed to call us brethren (Hebrews 2:11). Here too therefore a statement about the Risen One who has become the Firstling of a new creation.

> John 3:18
> 18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

That Name points to His qualities. One of those qualities is that He is the Only-begotten, namely the Firstborn. He is exceedingly exalted and all things are subjected to Him (Philippians 2:9; Hebrews 2:8).

> Hebrews 11:17
> 17 By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son.

It is clear that the term “only-begotten” has the meaning of firstborn, for what else has it to do with those promises? For they would be inherited from Abraham through Isaac to Jacob and so on. It is about that inheritance right that is spoken of. God had already appointed Isaac as son, as firstborn. If it then also says that Abraham offered his only son, that can only mean that it was the firstborn, even though another expression is used.

> 1 John 4:9
> 9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

This does not refer to His birth in Bethlehem. He is in the world, namely in us. This is very usual terminology with John. Think of John 14, 15 and 16 in which the Lord says that He would come to us, would be in us, would make His abode in the believer. That is what it is about here. God has sent His Son into the world, that we might live through Him. It is, incidentally, the same statement as in Galatians 2:20, where Paul says that he has been crucified with Christ and has been raised with Him and lives by the faith of the Son of God who gave Himself for him. Not who died for him but who gave Himself, who shows mercy and help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16), who perfects His strength in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). It concerns that Son. The Firstborn of all creation (Colossians 1:15), who has become Head of the Church (Colossians 1:18). The exceedingly exalted Christ (Philippians 2:9), far above all principality and power (Ephesians 1:21), who has been given to the Church as Head (Ephesians 1:22).

> 1 John 5:10–12
> 10 He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself:

he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.
11 And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.
12 He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

Christ dwells in us (2 Timothy 1:14). He has limited Himself for us, devoted Himself to us and given Himself for us (Ephesians 5:2). To Him has been given all power in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). At the moment He is not doing very much with that. What He is occupying Himself with now in our days is the calling of the Church out of this world. He has therefore given Himself to or for the Church, in short He has devoted His life to us, that we might live through Him. The other variant is that He has become High Priest after the order of Melchisedec after the power of an endless life (Hebrews 7:16–17). The intention is that we should in faith draw near to Him to have a share in His life and that His life should be lived in us.

The birthright examined more closely

It is a generally biblical thought that everything that first opens the womb is destined for the Lord. The firstfruits of the harvest, the firstlings of your cattle, the first of your dough, etc. That means that God from this old creation takes to Himself everything that is firstborn. The Lord Himself determines who that firstborn is. That seems to be in conflict with each other, but in God's plan of salvation this does indeed come together. On the one hand God chooses His firstborn, on the other hand that one has the birthright as such on the ground of birth. A fixed expression is that everything that openeth the womb is His (Exodus 13:2). That is purely a matter of the order in which things happen. On the other hand we find of the Lord Jesus that He was chosen and appointed as firstborn from among men by God Himself. That, however, happened because God raised Him from the dead. So He was nevertheless the one who opened the womb, but then in the figurative sense.

Applied to the Lord Jesus, therefore, both ideas are true. On the one hand He was reckoned as man and from among men chosen and appointed as firstborn by God Himself. God thereby gave Him the birthright. That is a matter of choice. The other side of the story is that the Lord Jesus was also in reality the first man. However, not of the old creation but of the new creation. God appointed Him as firstborn and He did that by raising Him as the first from the dead. The normal course of events is that man would rise on the Last Day, but for Him an exception was made. He rose from the dead about three thousand years earlier, so that He would be the First. So that His birthright on the ground of His resurrection could not be contested by anyone. Before the Lord rose from the dead, there had indeed already been others who rose from the dead, but they returned into this old creation. The Lord Jesus rose with eternal life and expressly as the Firstling of a new creation. That is why He is triumphantly called the Firstborn from the dead or the Firstborn of the dead (Colossians 1:18, Revelation 1:5). God raised this Man as the First from the dead because

He was obedient to God. He learned faith – obedience – from the things that He suffered (Hebrews 5:8). He became the Heir of God. The inheritance consists in practice of the new creation, for this old creation disappears. In that the Lord is indeed the First of the old creation, but not as man. As God He was of course before Abraham, as He Himself says (John 8:58). He was even before Adam.
On the one hand there is therefore a matter of choice; the testator himself determines whom he appoints as his firstborn. On the other hand it is a fixed given in the Bible that everything that is first born from the woman is destined for the Lord. It occurs quite often in Scripture that the womb is very closed, that there is barrenness. In those cases in which someone is nevertheless born, that one is always a type of Christ. The birth from the barren woman always speaks about the resurrection of Christ from the dead. That also means that God in all those cases Himself ensured that someone was born who thereby opened the womb.

Dominion
We pick up the thread in Genesis with the knowledge that Scripture knows two different persons with the name Adam. The first Adam is the Adam from Genesis and the second or last Adam from among other places 1 Corinthians 15:45 is the Lord Jesus Christ. Of these two it is said that not the first but the last would receive the birthright. Also in Genesis this plays a role, although it is not mentioned at length. It speaks about the sons of Adam, namely Cain and Abel. We usually call Abel Abel, but it really says Habel or Hebel.

> Genesis 4:4–7
> 4 And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering:
> 5 But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.
> 6 And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen?
> 7 If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.

The end of verse 7 is a statement about the firstborn, for that was Cain. The normal course of events would be that Cain would rule over Abel, because he after all had older rights. Of Adam it was already said that he should be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. To him was said the following:

The Birthright

> Genesis 1:28
> 28 And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

Adam would have dominion over the whole earth. He would occupy a higher position than any other creature on earth, as also appears from

Genesis 1:26. At the appearance of Adam's sons Cain and Abel the question arises to whom that birthright would be transferred. Who would inherit the rights of Adam? It is a misunderstanding that Genesis 1:28 would apply to the whole of humanity. Dominion is assigned to only one man, namely to Adam. At the moment he dies, the question becomes interesting as to whom this dominion must pass. Genesis 4 assumes that Cain as the elder would rule over his brother. They were brothers of the same father, but the one is expected to have dominion over the other. Just as later in the history of Esau and Jacob it is said that the elder shall serve the younger (Genesis 25:23). There too it appears that the elder in practice would not be the greater. It would be reversed. That also happens here. Cain did not rule over his brother, but struck him dead. In so doing he apparently also forfeited his birthright.

> Genesis 4:25
> 25 And Adam knew his wife again; and she bare a son, and called his name Seth: For God, said she, hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew.

The historical line that begins with Adam, with regard to dominion over the whole earth, therefore does not run through Cain, but through Seth. The family of Cain, incidentally, dies out in the flood. The survivor in the flood is Noah and that is a direct descendant of Seth, who was set in the place of Abel. As soon as birthright is spoken of in the Bible, there is already mention of a reversal. The rights do not go to the one who was born first, but to the second. Of the first it is said that if everything went normally, he would rule over all the others. Dominion was given to Adam and afterwards came to his heir, who on that ground was called the firstborn. With order it has nothing further to do. That the firstborn would have dominion is derived from the dominion of Adam himself.

The double portion

> Deuteronomy 21:15–17
> 15 If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the firstborn son be hers that was hated:
> 16 Then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn:
> 17 But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his.

The term "the hated" means "the one set back" or "the less beloved." That appears from among other places the history with Jacob and Esau: "…yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau…" (Malachi 1:2–3). God gave both to Jacob and to Esau an inheritance, albeit less to Esau. He was at any rate not dissatisfied with it, for he said that the Lord had given him much (Genesis 33:9). God had loved Jacob and hated Esau and therefore Jacob says that the Lord has given him everything and Esau less, so that there was nevertheless a difference. This means that the expression "hated" is not such a negative term as we interpret it in present-day English. From

verse 16 it appears that the father himself determines how he divides the inheritance. The right of the firstborn goes to the hated one. He receives a double portion. The birthright therefore includes that the firstborn receives a double portion: twice as much as the other sons. If there are two sons, the inheritance is divided into three parts. The one with the birthright receives two parts and the other one part. Where the birthright is exchanged in biblical history, that happens because it is a picture of God's own dealing with His Son.

Kingship

The "double portion" in connection with the birthright also speaks about kingship. If the king has several sons and if all those sons were to inherit a piece of the kingdom, then in practice there is no kingdom left. That is why it is regulated that the kingship is given to only one of the sons. It is about the fact that the kingdom must be maintained and therefore it is given to only one of the sons of the king. The one who inherits the kingdom is by definition the firstborn. Such a statement is also found in:

> 2 Chronicles 21:1–3
> 1 Now Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David: and Jehoram his son reigned in his stead.
> 2 And he had brethren the sons of Jehoshaphat, Azariah, and Jehiel, and Zechariah, and Azariah, and Michael, and Shephatiah: all these were the sons of Jehoshaphat king of Israel.
> 3 And their father gave them great gifts of silver, and of gold, and of precious things, with fenced cities in Judah: but the kingdom gave he to Jehoram; because he was the firstborn.

It is not known whether Jehoram was really born first, but that is not what the expression means either. He is after all the firstborn and therefore receives the birthright. His father had chosen him and he therefore receives the kingship. Here a direct connection is made between kingship or kingdom and birthright. The term "firstborn" is regarded as an honourable title because of the kingship that is after all attached to that birthright.

> Exodus 4:21–23
> 21 And the LORD said unto Moses, When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go.
> 22 And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn:
> 23 And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn.

This is a statement about the whole people of Israel. Although kingship is not spoken of here, it is implied that kingship has to do with the position of firstborn. This Israel would be the people to whom the kingship over all other nations would be given. If it can be said of the firstborn son that he occupies a position whereby he rules over the other sons (Genesis 4:7),

the same can be said of a people. God grants the birthright to Israel as a people and that can only mean that all the nations of the earth will one day be ruled by Israel. It means that in the future an Israelite world empire will be established.
In the Bible we find two lines that illustrate the appointing of Israel as the firstborn people. In the days of the Exodus there was an Egyptian world empire. This Egypt plays the role in the Bible of the mother of Israel. At the moment it is established in the Bible that there exists a people Israel, that people is in Egypt and is as it were born out of Egypt. Israel was taken and delivered out of Egypt in order ultimately in the future to take over the then position of Egypt. The birthright of Egypt is taken away and given to Israel. God chooses Israel as a people with birthright in comparison with all other nations.
The history of the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt can be compared with the calling of Abram out of Babel, Ur of the Chaldees. Babel had an older birthright of the nations. Out of Babel all nations were born and thereby also all idolatries. Hence Babel is also called the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth (Revelation 17:5). At the calling of Abram there is mention of how the birthright of Babel was taken away and given through Abram to Israel.

> Jeremiah 31:7–9
> 7 For thus saith the LORD; Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations: publish ye, praise ye, and say, O LORD, save thy people, the remnant of Israel.
> 8 Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her that travaileth with child together: a great company shall return thither.
> 9 They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble: for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.

This chapter speaks in general about the New Covenant. The matters concerning the birthright in Old Testament time always point to the fulfilment of it under the New Covenant by the coming of Christ. The last two statements from verse 9 are synonymous. “I am a father to Israel” means that Israel has that birthright above all nations. That was already said earlier in verse 7. “The chief of the nations” is a confirmation of the prominent position of Israel above the nations. The last statement in verse 9 “and Ephraim is my firstborn” also concerns that prominent position. The birthright within Israel has indeed gone to the tribe of Ephraim. Why then does it not say: “Judah is my firstborn?” For the King of this Israel would be none other than the Lord Jesus Christ from the seed of Judah. Yet Ephraim is mentioned. That is because this statement in Jeremiah is first applied to the Church in our days and afterwards still to Israel in the future. Israel and Ephraim are largely synonymous and in that light verse 20 should also be read.

> Jeremiah 31:20
> 20 Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake

against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the LORD.

In the rest of the chapter it is spoken about the New Covenant that would be made with Israel and Judah, with all twelve tribes. Israel would receive the promised position and also officially and in practice be appointed as firstborn over the nations of the earth. There may then be many kingdoms succeeding one another, but the kingdom will ultimately be left to no other people (Daniel 2:44). In Daniel it concerns the image of Nebuchadnezzar that represents the world empires of the earth. Then a stone falls that destroys that whole image. The stone is Christ, but that does not take away that here it is not only about Christ but about the whole of Israel. The Church is also included in that. Christ, the Church and Israel are all expressed in that one stone. All nations will be subjected to it. The birthright applied to Christ.

Birthright applied to Christ

Birthright therefore includes kingship, but is ultimately applied to the Man with the highest birthright that there is. Not only because He is the Firstborn of Adam, but also the Firstborn of God Himself. On the one hand He is Heir of Adam and on the other hand Heir of God. In practice the difference is not so great, for Adam too had received his kingship from God. Through Adam it is ultimately inherited to the Son of Adam, namely Christ. That is the long line. The short line is that the Lord Jesus was begotten by God Himself and then acknowledged by Him as Son and thereby received the birthright.

Colossians 1:14–15
14 In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:
15 Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature.

Those are indeed two statements, but the second is derived from the first. If Christ is the express image of God’s person (Hebrews 1:3), the outward expression of the invisible and unknowable God, then He is the representative of God and as such He has the oldest rights in the creation. If He moreover reveals Himself as man, then He is the man with the highest rights and by definition the Firstborn. Not only among men but among all creatures. That is a line that is drawn here from God. Along the way of Adam, however, it is more obvious. Adam would rule over humanity. That is why the Lord Jesus does not profile Himself in His walk on earth as the Son of God. He expressly and persistently calls Himself the Son of Adam, the Son of man. It means firstborn in the midst of men. The one with the highest and at the same time the oldest rights. His rights are even older and higher because He is God, or rather the outward expression of the Godhead. The words we find here correspond with the words from Philippians 2.

Philippians 2:7–10
7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.
9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:
10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth.

God has given Him a name – a title above every name – so that everyone and everything should be subjected to Him.

Colossians 1:16–17
16 For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:
17 And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

In the creation everything revolves around Him and the creation also exists for Him. That at the same time means that all lines from biblical history end up with Him. All things were created for Him. We can speak about birthright, but it has little sense if we do not draw the consequence that the birthright is ultimately in the highest instance applied to Christ Himself. The expression “before all things” means: before in rank, older in rank. It could just as well have said that He is above all things.

Resurrection from the dead

Colossians 1:18
18 And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

Here the term firstborn is explained further. It is added that He is the Firstborn from the dead. That means that He was raised from among the dead, leaving the rest of the dead behind. He was raised as the first and on that ground, according to the principles of the new creation, He is the One with the birthright and is in reality the First, also chronologically. He is the First who was raised in newness of life, in a glorified body. That is why He is the Firstborn. He was indeed not the first man, but He was the first Man who as a new creation rose from the dead. On that ground He has the birthright.

God raised Him from the dead before the resurrection of the dead, so that He might expressly be the First in all things. Normally that raising would have to wait until the Last Day. Something similar also happens with the Church. Since we are His body, we too shall be raised from the dead before the Last Day, so that we might share in His birthright. That is therefore also called a Church of the firstborn (Hebrews 12:23). When the Lord forbade His disciples to speak about this until the Son of man should have risen from the dead, they asked themselves what the resurrection from the dead was. From the Old Testament they knew the resurrection on the Last Day. Martha says in John 11:24 that she knows that Lazarus will rise again in the resurrection at the last day. The Lord also says several times that He would raise up His own at the last day (John 6:39, 40, 44, 54). The Lord now, however, speaks about resurrection from the dead and

that means resurrection with the leaving behind of the rest of the dead. They did not know that term, because it is not found in the Bible. Even when it concerns the resurrection of the Messiah, it is not clear that this would happen about 3000 years before the Last Day. If it can already be concluded from the Old Testament that the Messiah would rise, then one knows no better than that this would be at the resurrection of the dead.

Birthright and high-priesthood

What is also given to the firstborn is the high-priesthood. In Israel the birthright, the kingship and the priesthood were separated from one another. They proved to be different offices and they could in theory be given to different people. So it also happened under the law. The birthright among all the tribes came to Ephraim. The kingship was given to Judah and the priesthood to Levi. Aaron, the first high priest, was the firstborn from this tribe. For every high priest it applied that he was the firstborn, regardless of descent. Again not among all the tribes, but within the tribe of Levi. In Numbers the tribe of Levi is spoken of first. In Numbers it concerns counting in the first place; the book also derives its name from that. The people were counted before they entered the promised land.

> Numbers 1:47–54
> 47 But the Levites after the tribe of their fathers were not numbered among them.
> 48 For the LORD had spoken unto Moses, saying,
> 49 Only thou shalt not number the tribe of Levi, neither take the sum of them among the children of Israel:
> 50 But thou shalt appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of testimony, and over all the vessels thereof, and over all things that belong to it: they shall bear the tabernacle, and all the vessels thereof; and they shall minister unto it, and shall encamp round about the tabernacle.
> 51 And when the tabernacle setteth forward, the Levites shall take it down: and when the tabernacle is to be pitched, the Levites shall set it up: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death.
> 52 And the children of Israel shall pitch their tents, every man by his own camp, and every man by his own standard, throughout their hosts.
> 53 But the Levites shall pitch round about the tabernacle of testimony, that there be no wrath upon the congregation of the children of Israel: and the Levites shall keep the charge of the tabernacle of testimony.
> 54 And the children of Israel did according to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so did they.

In this Scripture passage it is made clear that the Levites were not simply counted with the people. In Numbers 1 the people are counted, excluding all who belong to the tribe of Levi. That does not mean that the Levites were not counted. They were indeed counted, but as a separate group and not with the people as such, because they would occupy a separate position within the people. That position is also described. They were entrusted with the care of everything that had to do with the religion. In

practice that meant the care of everything that belonged to the tabernacle, the service of the tabernacle and the transport of the tabernacle. More generally it is said that they “shall keep the charge of the tabernacle of testimony” (verse 53). They would guard it and thereby preserve it. That is why they would also take care of the transport, the maintenance and the service.
When the people encamped, the tabernacle would be set up in the midst of the people. Actually it was the other way round. The tabernacle was set up and the people would encamp around it in four groups: to the north, east, south and west. The Levites, however, would pitch their camp around the tabernacle, in the midst of the people. From inside to outside there is first the tabernacle, around it the Levites, then three tribes to the north, east, south and west. That means that access to the tabernacle was screened off by the Levites because they after all would keep the charge of the tabernacle of testimony. They therefore occupied a special position within the people and in a religious sense they had the most prominent position. Concerning those Levites it is then spoken in Numbers 3.

> Numbers 3:1–4
> 1 These also are the generations of Aaron and Moses in the day that the LORD spake with Moses in mount Sinai.
> 2 And these are the names of the sons of Aaron; Nadab the firstborn, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar.
> 3 These are the names of the sons of Aaron, the priests which were anointed, whom he consecrated to minister in the priest’s office.
> 4 And Nadab and Abihu died before the LORD, when they offered strange fire before the LORD, in the wilderness of Sinai, and they had no children: and Eleazar and Ithamar ministered in the priest’s office in the sight of Aaron their father.

The term “whom he consecrated” is especially used with priests. The family of Aaron was consecrated as priests, or rather their hand was filled. The family of Aaron had the birthright among the families within the tribe of Levi. Within the family of Aaron someone again had the birthright. Initially that was Aaron, later it was Eleazar. Eleazar was thereby firstborn and thereby high priest of Israel but also firstborn of the tribe of Levi. He was both the highest within the tribe and within all the tribes.

The tribe of Levi as servant of Aaron

> Numbers 3:5–6
> 5 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
> 6 Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister unto him.

The tribe of Levi was given to Aaron, so that they might serve him. Aaron was the firstborn within the tribe of Levi and thereby the highest within the tribe. The Levites had no other function than to serve Aaron. The work that the Levites did was therefore always regarded as the work of Aaron. Everything they did, they did in the service of Aaron and under his responsibility. All Levitical work was thereby the work of the high priest. A comparison can be made with the Church in our days. Where we serve the Lord, we do His work. That is why it is so important for us to know what

the work of Christ is. If we do not know that, we cannot serve Him in practice either. We have been given to Him in order to serve Him. The tribe of Levi in relation to the high priest of the Old Covenant is a picture of the Church in relation to the high priest of the New Covenant.

> Numbers 3:6–7
> 6 Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister unto him.
> 7 And they shall keep his charge, and the charge of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of the congregation, to do the service of the tabernacle.

In Numbers 1:53 it says that they would keep the charge of the tabernacle of testimony, while here in Numbers 3:7 it says that they would keep the charge of Aaron. In that the thought is obviously that Aaron was responsible for the charge of the tabernacle and all that would be done with it and in it. Everything the Levites did was therefore ascribed to Aaron. They were given to Aaron so that they might serve him. In a religious sense the Levites had a prominent position in Israel, but that was a serving position.

> Numbers 3:8–9
> 8 And they shall keep all the instruments of the tabernacle of the congregation, and the charge of the children of Israel, to do the service of the tabernacle.
> 9 And thou shalt give the Levites unto Aaron and to his sons: they are wholly given unto him out of the children of Israel.

In this verse it is said that the Levites are not only given to Aaron, but also to the sons of Aaron and therefore to the priests. To Aaron was given the high-priesthood and all his sons would be priests. The rest of the tribe of Levi was therefore made subject to the firstborn within the tribe. The thought that should actually apply to the whole people we find here applied to one tribe. The firstborn was indeed high priest and in the verse it is also still to be read that Aaron was a kind of king over the whole tribe of Levi. The Levites were given to him to serve him, not in terms of kingship and birthright in connection with the whole people, but in the limited application of the tribe of Levi. All Levites were subordinate to the family of Aaron and the family of Aaron itself was subordinate to him.

> Numbers 3:10
> 10 And thou shalt appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall wait on their priest’s office: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death.

The family of Aaron receives the priesthood within the tribe of Levi. That is why the priesthood is also called the Aaronic priesthood. On other occasions it is called the Levitical priesthood. In practice it is exactly the same. When it is not specifically spoken about priesthood it still concerns different matters. A priest is indeed a Levite, but a Levite is therefore not yet a priest. If one is a Levite and moreover of Aaron, then one is actually a priest. Levites are all from the tribe of Levi and the priests are included in that. Think in this connection of the parable of the good Samaritan. A priest and a Levite came along the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. On the one hand that is the same, for a priest is a Levite. On the other hand it is

different, because a priest within the tribe of Levi has a more important function than a Levite who is not a priest. It is striking that in this verse the word “appoint” is used. For the son or the firstborn is after all appointed. Kings are appointed, but here priests are appointed. The term appoint is used for all three functions.
The word “cometh nigh” is often used in the Bible for the description of the work of a priest, namely coming near from the people before the face of God. Also the word “to offer” in general has the same meaning as to come near. Hence the same term in the New Testament (Hebrews in particular) is used for our present position. Of that it is said that the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did, by the which we draw nigh unto God (Hebrews 7:19). The term to draw near implies that we are priests. That is the practical biblical content of the word to draw near. The stranger who therefore in one way or another tries to fulfil the priesthood will be put to death.

Levites receive priestly responsibility

> Numbers 3:11–12
> 11 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
> 12 And I, behold, I have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of all the firstborn that openeth the matrix among the children of Israel: therefore the Levites shall be mine.

This is election. God has taken the Levites instead of all (or every) firstborn from among the children of Israel. The firstborns that there were in the tribes and families of Israel lost their priestly responsibility from this moment. That responsibility was given to the Levites. On this occasion it is immediately determined who the firstborn would be, namely not the one with the birthright, but the one who openeth the matrix among the children of Israel. By firstborn is therefore understood: the first male who is born from the mother. From there it is of course counted. From the father it can also, but then there are fewer firstborns. The firstborn of Joseph was called James, but the firstborn of Mary was called Jesus (Matthew 13:55). Everything that openeth the matrix is the firstborn, but whether that firstborn also receives the birthright is throughout the whole Bible always again the question. Here too, for all these firstborns are relieved of all their religious responsibility. In general the families were controlled and ruled by heads of the families. Among many nations that still applies. A family head is not always the eldest, but the one who has the highest rights within the family. It concerns the fact that the firstborn, the head of the family, responsible for the family and in particular for religious matters, is relieved of that function. The function as regards religious matters is taken away from the firstborns and transferred to the Levites. That means in practice that, when there are problems in connection with religious matters, the Israelites must not go to the heads of the families with them, but to the Levites and in particular to Aaron, for he is the head of the whole tribe.
Normally the firstborn bears the priestly responsibility, so that in general not in Israel, but outside Israel the king was considered to be a priest. If he was not that in practice, he was still officially the head of the priests. We

find that mentioned on several occasions in the Bible, in particular with Jethro, the king of Midian or the priest of Midian. He was both. He was the father-in-law of Moses. Moses' father in the natural line was Levi, albeit with some generations in between. Through Levi Moses received the Levitical priesthood, at least his brother Aaron. Moses was the son-in-law and thereby the son and heir of Jethro, who was king and priest of the Midianites. Strangely enough Moses was thereby the priest of the Midianites. We usually do not think so positively about Midian because it sets itself up as an enemy of Israel. In that connection I could also refer to Melchisedec. He too was king and priest. It is, however, not entirely correct to make that reference, because it is a comparison in the wrong direction. I am namely trying to show that in the Old Testament kings were usually priests, but Melchisedec is not an Old Testament but a New Testament figure. He appeared as announcer of the New Covenant even before the Old Testament was ever confirmed and would come into operation. In that function he is also later described in the New Testament (Hebrews 7:1).
Melchisedec as king and priest was nothing other than the appearing of the Lord Himself.
Another example: In Egypt in the days of Joseph it appeared that priests were in the service of Pharaoh. Pharaoh was therefore in practice high priest. Priests stand under the king, because the king is not only king, but officially also priest. He is the firstborn within the people and is king and priest on the ground of his birthright. Only in Israel was it separated. We read here about the fact that the priesthood was given to the tribe of Levi. As far as the tribes of Israel are concerned, the birthright was already given in Genesis to the tribe of Ephraim (Genesis 48:20). If the priesthood had to be given to one of the tribes of Israel, it would have been given to Ephraim, but that does not happen. The same applies to the kingship. For the one who thinks that at the moment Jacob blessed his sons he gave the kingship to the tribe of Judah as he gave the birthright to the tribe of Ephraim, I must disappoint you. The statements of Jacob are indeed translated as if they concerned kingship, but that is a premature translation. Jacob namely says that the sceptre shall not depart from Judah until Shiloh comes (Genesis 49:10). Because the term is translated with sceptre, we derive the kingship from it. The more obvious translation is: the tribe of Judah shall not depart; shall continue to exist. That in itself says nothing, for all the tribes would continue to exist and therefore it can only mean that this tribe would remain known, could be pointed out. That is then also the special thing about Judah: it can still be pointed out, but the other tribes no longer. Even where we think we can point out the rest of the people, it still proves impossible to point out the tribes as such.
If kingship had to be given to one of the tribes of Israel, it would have been to Ephraim. It was, however, given to Judah. The tribe of Levi therefore receives the birthright in this verse, but not in the place of Ephraim and certainly not in the place of Judah. That simply continues to exist. The birthright is therefore given to Levi only in connection with religious matters. The nice thing is that these matters in Israel are regulated under the rules of the Old Covenant. Later under the New

Covenant the firstborn of Israel would be the king and he was from the tribe of Judah. That automatically means that there came an end to that special position of the tribe of Levi, at least as it was under the Old Covenant.
The firstborns are here as it were redeemed or delivered from their function, for that is roughly the term we shall come across later. Their function is taken over by the Levites in general. Normally the firstborns of the Lord were more than the rest of Israel. On this occasion the Levites are set in their place. The birthright thereby passes to the Levites. It is a transition that we find throughout the whole Bible.

> Numbers 3:13
> 13 Because all the firstborn are mine; for on the day that I smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I hallowed unto me all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast: mine shall they be: I am the LORD.

If we understand that expression, we also understand why of the Church in the New Testament it is said that it is a Church of the firstborn, as among other places in Hebrews 12:23 it is mentioned. The firstborns are there mentioned in connection with the priesthood and the New Covenant. The firstborn is the one who openeth the matrix and is therefore indeed the one who is born first. That is destined for the Lord. The firstborns are from the woman, whereby the woman is of course the Old Testament Israel, the woman from Revelation 12. Then the first male son was born. He was caught up unto God and to His throne, for everything that openeth the matrix is His. The firstborns are for the Lord and unless otherwise stated, called to kingship and priesthood. That also applies to the animals, although these could be redeemed. They then had to be paid for, be redeemed. In principle, however, they were for the Lord.

> Numbers 3:16–17
> 16 And Moses numbered them according to the word of the LORD, as he was commanded.
> 17 And these were the sons of Levi by their names; Gershon, and Kohath, and Merari.

Those are the three sons of Levi. That means that the tribe of Levi falls into three families. They also later had a different ministry. Mentioned are the Gershonites, the Kohathites and the Merarites. Gershonites and Merarites are by definition not priests because Aaron was from the family of Kohath and priests were therefore always Kohathites. Priests are indeed Levites and Kohathites, but not all Kohathites are priests. They must then also still be of the family of Aaron and that only applies to a part of the sons of Kohath.

> Numbers 3:39
> 39 All that were numbered of the Levites, which Moses and Aaron numbered at the commandment of the LORD, throughout their families, all the males from a month old and upward, were twenty and two thousand.

The two refers in the Bible to the birthright. Although it is mentioned only once that the firstborn receives a double portion, it remains so that the number is very often used to refer to the double portion of the firstborn. Hence we come across quite a few histories, particularly in the New

Testament, in which according to the one account it concerns one man and according to the other account two. At the grave of the Lord Jesus one sees in the one story one angel (Mark 16:5), according to the other story one sees two (Luke 24:4, John 20:12). According to the one account there was one blind man who was healed, Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46), according to the other account there were two blind men (Matthew 20:30). According to the one account it was Legion who was healed (Mark 5:9, Luke 8:30), according to the other account there were two men (Matthew 8:28). When there are two it points to the birthright.

> Numbers 3:40
> 40 And the LORD said unto Moses, Number all the firstborn of the males of the children of Israel from a month old and upward, and take the number of their names.

If it concerns every firstborn, it would be nice if there were exactly as many Levites as firstborns. For the Levites would after all have to replace the firstborns.

> Numbers 3:41
> 41 And thou shalt take the Levites for me (I am the LORD) instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel; and the cattle of the Levites instead of their cattle; and the Levites shall be mine: I am the LORD.

Earlier it was stated that the Lord Himself had taken the Levites from the children of Israel. We find the same emphasis here again when the Lord says: I am the LORD. He determines the service and can do that. The apostle Paul later speaks about God’s sovereignty. God chooses whom He will, He hardens whom He will, He has mercy on whom He will (Romans 9:18).

So He chooses the Levites here.

> Numbers 3:42–51
> 42 And Moses numbered, as the LORD commanded him, all the firstborn among the children of Israel.
> 43 And all the firstborn males by the number of names, from a month old and upward, of those that were numbered of them, were twenty and two thousand two hundred and threescore and thirteen.
> 44 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
> 45 Take the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel, and the cattle of the Levites instead of their cattle; and the Levites shall be mine: I am the LORD.
> 46 And for those that are to be redeemed of the two hundred and threescore and thirteen of the firstborn of the children of Israel, which are more than the Levites;
> 47 Thou shalt even take five shekels apiece by the poll, after the shekel of the sanctuary shalt thou take them: (the shekel is twenty gerahs:)
> 48 And thou shalt give the money, wherewith the odd number of them is to be redeemed, unto Aaron and to his sons.
> 49 And Moses took the redemption money of them that were over and above them that were redeemed by the Levites:

50 Of the firstborn of the children of Israel took he the money; a thousand three hundred and threescore and five shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary:
51 And Moses gave the money of them that were redeemed unto Aaron and to his sons, according to the word of the LORD, as the LORD commanded Moses.

Here it is described at length how every firstborn was redeemed by a Levite, except for those 273. Those were redeemed with money, but that comes in practice to exactly the same thing. Their responsibility is taken away from them and transferred to the tribe of Levi. We find the same line of thought also set out in Numbers 8.

Numbers 8:13–19
13 And thou shalt set the Levites before Aaron, and before his sons, and offer them for an offering unto the LORD.
14 Thus shalt thou separate the Levites from among the children of Israel: and the Levites shall be mine.
15 And after that shall the Levites go in to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation: and thou shalt cleanse them, and offer them for an offering.
16 For they are wholly given unto me from among the children of Israel; instead of such as open every womb, even instead of the firstborn of all the children of Israel, have I taken them unto me.
17 For all the firstborn of the children of Israel are mine, both man and beast: on the day that I smote every firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified them for myself.
18 And I have taken the Levites for all the firstborn of the children of Israel.
19 And I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and to his sons from among the children of Israel, to do the service of the children of Israel in the tabernacle of the congregation, and to make an atonement for the children of Israel: that there be no plague among the children of Israel, when the children of Israel come nigh unto the sanctuary.

The Levites are officially given to Aaron and in fact that whole tribe is regarded as a tribe of firstborns. Every member of that tribe fulfils the function of a firstborn, while this is not even a tribe with the birthright. Nevertheless the birthright is emphatically connected through this tribe with the priesthood. We see that best from the New Testament position of Christ. He is described to us not only as the One who was born first, who as the first opened the matrix (Isaiah 66:9). He was appointed as firstborn Son with the birthright and on that ground He is called King and High Priest (Hebrews 5:5). Birthright has directly to do with kingship and priesthood.

Function and responsibilities of the Levitical priesthood

The Levitical priests receive all kinds of responsibilities, of which the religious matters are the most important. They are regarded as guardians and preservers of the tabernacle (later the temple) and the tabernacle and temple service. There is also still a subdivision within the tribe of Levi

– outside the three families mentioned earlier – whereby certain families were appointed as doorkeepers, singers, musicians, etc. That means that within the tribe as such there still existed a certain order of rank. One of the most important characteristics of the Levitical office is, however, that they were responsible in particular for maintaining the law. They were thereby at the same time the judicial power, the police and the social service. All this comes down to upholding the Word of God. That of course soon becomes upholding the law, but it is much more extensive. Although we usually find a list of all kinds of responsibilities of priests and Levites, it is undoubtedly so that maintaining God's Word is actually a summary of the whole list. That responsibility is normally laid upon the firstborn, but in this case upon this tribe that is appointed for it. There are many Scripture passages that go about this.

> Deuteronomy 33:8
> 8 And of Levi he said, Let thy Thummim and thy Urim be with thy holy one, whom thou didst prove at Massah, and with whom thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah.

Moses speaks here about the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, although he says it all to Levi. The position and the function of Levi will ultimately come to the man who was proved at Massah and Meribah. The position of the tribe of Levi and of Aaron in particular will in the future be taken over by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. It is also a text to show that Christ is none other than Jehovah

Deuteronomy 33:9
9 Who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children: for they have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant.

The Levites are expected not to know father, mother and brothers, just as Lady Justice is provided with a blindfold. A parallel is found in a statement of Jesus that when one wants to inherit the Kingdom, one must leave father, mother, etc. (Matthew 19:29).

> Deuteronomy 33:10
> 10 They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law: they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon thine altar.

Here the most important function of the tribe is brought forward. That is indeed the service in the tabernacle or temple, by bringing incense offerings. But the tribe of Levi would especially teach the Word of God, the law, to Israel. The Levites were therefore also held responsible for the administration of justice. That they would literally lay incense upon the altar is clear. I hope that from these verses you gather that it is a sweet savour to the Lord when the Levites teach Jacob or Israel the rights, the commandments of the Lord. The incense offering is a picture of everything that is pleasing to God.

> 2 Chronicles 17:7–9
> 7 Also in the third year of his reign he sent to his princes, even to Benhail, and to Obadiah, and to Zechariah, and to Nethaneel, and to Michaiah, to teach in the cities of Judah.
> 8 And with them he sent Levites, even Shemaiah, and Nethaniah,

and Zebadiah, and Asahel, and Shemiramoth, and Jehonathan, and Adonijah, and Tobijah, and Tobadonijah, Levites; and with them Elishama and Jehoram, priests.

9 And they taught in Judah, and had the book of the law of the LORD with them, and went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught the people.

Here the priests, but especially the Levites, are appointed to teach the Word of God to the Israelites. The Israelites were all expected to know the law. For this purpose the Levites had the book of the law, the five books of Moses, with them. A few chapters later we find the same thing again.

2 Chronicles 30:22

22 And Hezekiah spake comfortably unto all the Levites that taught the good knowledge of the LORD: and they did eat throughout the feast seven days, offering peace offerings, and making confession to the LORD God of their fathers.

It speaks of Levites who had understanding in the good knowledge of the Lord. These are the good Levites who would make the knowledge of the Lord known to Israel. Here too it concerns the days of the reformation of Hezekiah. That is the period when suddenly in Israel the Passover was kept, for they had never done that before.

2 Chronicles 35:1–3

1 Moreover Josiah kept a passover unto the LORD in Jerusalem: and they killed the passover on the fourteenth day of the first month.

2 And he set the priests in their charges, and encouraged them to the service of the house of the LORD.

3 And said unto the Levites that taught all Israel, which were holy unto the LORD, Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David king of Israel did build; it shall not be a burden upon your shoulders: serve now the LORD your God, and his people Israel.

It is striking that it says in between: “…that taught all Israel, which were holy unto the LORD…” Normally this ought to apply to all Levites and it is completely superfluous to mention it. It is probably added because there were many Levites who did not teach Israel and who were not holy unto the Lord. Only to those Levites who taught all Israel and who were holy unto the Lord is it said that they should set the holy ark in the house. They performed the service. Here again it is made clear that the most important responsibility of the Levites is the teaching of Israel and that by doing so they would be holy unto the Lord

Nehemiah 8:2–3

2 And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month.

3 And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law.

In verse 2 Ezra is called the scribe and in verse 3 the priest. The one simply does not go without the other. The priests had to be scribes or

teachers of the law and vice versa, of course. The first day of the seventh month was, incidentally, officially the New Year of the civil year.

> Nehemiah 8:4–8
> 4 And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, and Shema, and Anaiah, and Urijah, and Hilkiah, and Maaseiah, on his right hand; and on his left hand, Pedaiah, and Mishael, and Malchiah, and Hashum, and Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam.
> 5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up:
> 6 And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground.
> 7 Also Jeshua, and Bani, and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, caused the people to understand the law: and the people stood in their place.
> 8 So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.

Ezra spoke from a high wooden platform. That is where our present-day pulpit comes from. In principle it could just as well be said that it was a high platform: a wooden elevation from which to address the people. Ezra taught them from there and the people listened standing up. As long as the people are taught in the law, the people stand where they ought to stand and remain standing there. Also when we listen to the Word of God and submit ourselves to it, we stand in the place where we ought to be.

> Nehemiah 8:9–10
> 9 And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law.
> 10 Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength.

By “distinctly” is meant that it was read with proper intonation, in an understandable manner, without rushing through it. When that is done properly, most of it is already explained. It was read aloud, but the meaning was also explained, so that they understood it. They had heard and understood the law, after which there was a feast and they sent portions to one another (verse 10). Portions were gifts. For they had heard the glad tidings (the New Covenant): that there would be deliverance, how salvation would be heard, and how there would be peace. Think here of the Lord Jesus Himself, who, beginning at Moses and all the prophets, expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself (Luke 24:27). Here they officially had nothing other than the books of

Moses, but from them the New Covenant could be made known. The joy spoken of here is of course the joy of the New Covenant. The Feast of Tabernacles that followed is also the expression of that.

The firstborn and the right of inheritance

The term “firstborn” generally places more emphasis on the right of inheritance and less on the relationship connected with it. In the Bible (particularly in the New Testament) one also speaks of the son. It is then implied that it is the firstborn, without the term itself being used. That is always the case when Christ is called the Son of God. When He is so called, it always falls within the framework of the birthright as it is announced in the Old Testament. He is then not one of many, but the One, and in particular the first Son. When in the New Testament appointment or adoption as sons is spoken of, it always concerns the birthright.

> Galatians 4:20–31
> 20 I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you.
> 21 Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?
> 22 For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman.
> 23 But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise.
> 24 Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar.
> 25 For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children.
> 26 But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.
> 27 For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband.
> 28 Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.
> 29 But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.
> 30 Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.
> 31 So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.

In this history the question concerns the right of inheritance: who would be the heir of Abraham? Both sons could come into consideration for this, but to which of the two is preference given? Who is the beloved, the firstborn who would inherit the birthright? He would become the heir of Abraham and even more the heir of the promises made to Abraham. Galatians 3 speaks of the two different covenants that were made with Abraham or with his seed or seeds. These two covenants have directly to do with Israel and the position of Israel. On the one hand we have the

covenant of promise, the covenant with Abraham, and on the other hand the covenant of the law as it was confirmed to Israel 430 years later through the mediator of the Old Covenant (Galatians 3:17). In Galatians 3:19 “mediator” is translated with a capital letter, but that is a misunderstanding. That would mean that Christ was the Mediator of the law, and that He certainly was not. That was Moses. The law was given by Moses, the mediator of the Old Covenant, but grace and truth and therefore the New Covenant came by Jesus Christ (John 1:17).
The first has to do with the promise that is given so freely to Abraham and in particular to his seed. The other has to do with the law as it was given to Israel and as it ruled over Israel. In Galatians 4 that history is set out more fully. There it speaks of the situation as it existed under the law. As long as the people lived under the law, they would in any case not be an heir. They were an heir in the sense that they might eventually inherit, but that would then have to lie in the future. There is a difference between one who thinks he will inherit and one who ultimately inherits. These two interpretations of the word “heir” make it difficult to use the term. The Scripture does use it, however, so we must simply handle it carefully.

> Galatians 4:1
> 1 Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all;

As long as the heir is a child, that is to say immature, he differs nothing from a bondservant. That is what it says. The word is always translated as servant, but it means slave or bondservant. That is actually the same, although a different feeling is attached to it. The slavery as we know it does not come from the Bible. The principle that one was in bondage and therefore a bondservant, property of another, did exist, and in that way those terms are also used in the New Testament. A servant is a bondservant. He is not his own but belongs to another. So it was also known from Old Testament times. That is why children are also expected to hear and to obey, for they are the property of their parents. Both children and slaves are in bondage in the sense that they are expected to listen to their owner. Then it says that he is lord of all. Lord in the sense of owner, but then in the future. The child is still a slave, although in the future he will be owner of the whole. The father decides when the child will be appointed as adult heir or when the bondservant will become a son. Earlier in the Bible we already find the peculiar phenomenon that some sons are referred to as servants and servants as sons. Where a child serves the father and differs nothing from a servant and is then appointed as son, it is also not unthinkable that a slave who serves the same lord honourably and conscientiously will be appointed as heir. In practice the difference is not so great. The same thing is already stated in Genesis 15. There the Lord confirms His promises to Abraham. Abraham says that it does not matter so much to him, because he has no children.

> Genesis 15:1–3
> 1 After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.
> 2 And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go

childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?
3 And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.

Eliezer, who in practice was the servant of Abraham, would in the absence of children of Abraham automatically become his heir. Abraham is more or less at peace with that and therefore says that the son of his house will be his possessor. The servant would therefore be appointed as son if nothing changed. The Lord, however, speaks against that.

Genesis 15:4
4 And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.

It is a relatively obvious thought that the ultimate heir is appointed as firstborn on the ground of his faithful service. Hence inheritance in the Bible is brought into direct connection with reward. Where the child serves the father in the right way, that is to the father's satisfaction, the father will appoint that child as firstborn son. Even if it is someone who has not come forth from his own body, it is obvious that the best servant will be appointed as son. If a child has not served the father, he must not expect to become heir. That is the biblical order of things.

To us it is said that where we as children of God now serve God in a manner well-pleasing to Him, He will also appoint us individually as sons. To that we are called. The reverse is true: where we are called to appointment as sons (Ephesians 1:5), we are also called to serve the living God as His children (1 Thessalonians 1:9) in order to receive reward or a crown in the future. A crown stands for kingship and that is for the firstborn. A crown may possibly also be given to a priest, but that remains the same story. Where we serve the Lord as priest, we shall be acknowledged by Him in the future. In short, we receive reward or a crown or we are appointed as firstborn or son. Under all circumstances it is exactly the same. That is also stated in Galatians 4:1. As long as the heir is a child, he differs nothing from a servant. The term "child" even carries the meaning of being under age, someone who still has no right to speak. He has the duty to listen. That is also the right order. First the duty to listen, and when one has fulfilled that duty, one probably receives the right to speak. Moreover, someone who has heard nothing also has nothing to say.

Child and servant under the Old Covenant

Galatians 4:2
2 But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father.

This is a description of the situation of Israel under the law. Perhaps to be regarded as a child of God but under the Old Testament as in bondage and under slavery to the law, until the time which the Father, God Himself, had appointed. The expression "until the time appointed of the father" corresponds with that in Galatians 3:24. The time appointed beforehand by the father was the time until the appearing of Christ. Thereby is not meant His birth, but His resurrection. In other places we learn that the law

was ended by the death of the Lord Jesus and that the New Covenant came into force at His resurrection from the dead.

> Galatians 4:3
> 3 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.

“In bondage” certainly has the meaning of being brought under slavery. Generally the elements of the world are understood to mean the law. Characteristic of a child is that it lives under the law of the parents. Hence it is so problematic for every human being to live from grace. From childhood he has known nothing else than law. Puberty, that period in a person’s life when children break free from the law of the parents and must begin to bear their own responsibility and must be released by the parents, corresponds exactly with this period in New Testament history: the end of the law and the beginning of the New Covenant. Such a period was and is problematic. Just as many people never become adults, so in this respect also many have never become adults. Even in our own days there are many people who live under the law and come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but never learn to bear their own responsibility. They never become free from the law, although they ought to stand in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made them free (Galatians 5:1). In principle it is exactly the same; the same principles play a role in it.

> Galatians 4:4–5
> 4 But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,
> 5 To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

Of course this concerns the time which the Father had appointed beforehand. That is the time of the coming of Christ. It is important that we hold fast that the Lord Jesus was only appointed as Son at His resurrection from the dead. Before that happened, He was made of a woman and made under the law. He lived under the law in order that He might redeem all others who lived under the law. He came to these slaves who had been brought into bondage in order that He might lead them out. Think here of the history in which Moses appeared among the children of Israel in slavery in order that he might lead them out. But Moses was the mediator of the Old Covenant. That history is a type of how the New Covenant would begin. The Lord Jesus appeared to those who were in slavery, namely under the law, in order that He might redeem them. The people did not want Moses as deliverer, so that he only returned forty years later to redeem them after all. That is also a picture of our present dispensation, in which also those who were in slavery did not want to be redeemed, so that the Lord did not return forty years later but two thousand years later to redeem them after all.

> Galatians 4:6–7
> 6 And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.
> 7 Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

The principle of the child who would become a son is applied to the position of the Jewish people. One lives under the slavery of the law, but is led out of the house of bondage by the Lord Jesus in order that one might be appointed as son. Here these things are not brought forward so that one might come to faith and be redeemed. What the apostle brings forward here is that the Galatians were already believers and placed in liberty, but that they did not care for it so much. They preferred to remain slaves in a similar way to the children of Israel, who at times longed back to the slavery in Egypt. They were cared for (for otherwise they could not work) and bore no responsibility. So it is with many believers in our days and with these Galatians also. They had a preference for the law instead of the liberty of the New Covenant. They had that in common with the Corinthians. In 2 Corinthians it concerns being in bondage under the Old or the New Covenant. That is to say: being a child or a son, being a slave or being free. These terms child and son are here specifically applied to Israel. Childship or being a slave is considered to belong to the Old Covenant, and sonship or being free to the New Covenant. One is therefore a son when one is free.

The slavery of the law lasted until the death of the Lord Jesus, after which at the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ every believer is free and therefore an heir. “The time appointed of the father” is therefore the date of the resurrection of Christ. It is brought forward here as a historical fact, so that it might also be experienced and applied in practice in the life of these Galatians and in the life of believers. Since the death of the Lord Jesus no one lives any longer under the law. In practice the law rules over everyone who still places himself under that law. It is, however, not God’s intention that since the death of the Lord Jesus anyone should still live under the law. No unbeliever, of course, but also no believer. Nevertheless it is so that up to our own days many believers live under the law. They live under the elements of the world: under law, without the article. That is the occasion for writing this letter. Believers ought to learn to live in the liberty of the New Covenant.

The Old Covenant finds its fulfilment in the New Covenant that came into being through the resurrection of Christ. In the past it was officially so that a Jew who came to faith since the resurrection of Christ was placed in liberty. At that time in the eyes of God he was under the law a child, but since the resurrection of Christ that same believer is free from the law and a son of God. For he has received a share in the promised inheritance and that is nothing other than the New Covenant. That was also promised to Abraham, although it could not be so called because the Old Covenant did not yet exist. The New Covenant is a direct fulfilment of the promises to Abraham. The law which came 430 years after those promises also had to be set aside before the promises—which were older—could be fulfilled under the New Covenant. The apostle applies the same principles to us and then describes us believers as children. When we serve the living God (and not the law), are servants of the New Covenant and let ourselves be led in life by the Mediator of the New Covenant, the Son of God, we shall in the future be appointed as sons of God.

Galatians 4:22–23
22 For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman.
23 But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise.

Those who desire to live under the law are expected to know the law and this history. To Abraham a son—an heir—had been promised, after which both Abraham and Sarah concluded that nothing more would come of it. Sarah proved to be barren, so that the handmaid of Sarah was placed at Abraham's disposal. Since Hagar the handmaid was the property of Sarah, the sons of Hagar would also be her property. Because Sarah was married to Abraham, who would have been the natural begetter, nothing would prevent them from appointing this son from the handmaid as their own son. The son who is born from Hagar is regarded as the heir of Abraham, but the Lord does not agree with that. The Lord had Sarah in mind. He spoke to Abraham about a son who would come forth from his own body, but the Lord was thinking of Sarah (although it is not added). Hence He later returned to it and said that Sarah would have a son and that in Isaac the seed would be called (Genesis 21:12). Eventually there were two sons and there was disagreement between the two mothers and the two sons, which led to the handmaid together with her son having to depart. Sarah took the initiative, but Abraham did not like it, after which the Lord said that he must hearken to his wife. The Lord said to Abraham that he must drive out the handmaid and son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman (Galatians 4:30).

Galatians 4:24
24 Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar.

Those Galatians had apparently never heard of that allegory, and most Christians have not either. These Old Testament histories have a prophetic meaning in connection with the days in which we live. We are expected to be heirs of Abraham, for Abraham is the father of all believers and they therefore all receive a share in the blessings of Abraham (Galatians 3:7, 9). In what way? As Ishmael, as a slave of God and living under the slavery of the law, or as Isaac, as a free man, serving God from liberty and of his own will? Galatians 4 points out that we can only serve God as free men, for to that end He has made us free and to that end we are delivered from slavery. It is difficult to speak of an inheritance if we ourselves are slaves, for in the history of Abraham the son of the bondwoman had to be driven out.

Galatians 3:17
17 And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.

God made a promise to Abraham with regard to a son. That promise is not made of none effect by the coming of Ishmael. In Galatians 4:24 the correspondence is made clear between mount Sinai, bondage and Hagar.

That list can still be supplemented with law, Old Covenant, Ishmael, slavery, Jerusalem.

> Galatians 4:25
> 25 For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children.

The Jerusalem which now is is still under the law. It still corresponds with Ishmael, with slavery. Just as Ishmael from Hagar did not inherit and was driven out, so an Israel living under the slavery of the Old Covenant will not inherit and will be driven out. Hagar, Ishmael and Sinai stand for the law, but that has been ended and the New Covenant has begun. The opposite of the Jerusalem which now is, is a future Jerusalem. Israel still holds fast to the law, in spite of the death and resurrection of Christ. In the future, at the coming again of Christ, Israel will after all be brought under the New Covenant. Literally the Jerusalem which now is will be destroyed at the end of the seventieth week of Daniel. Figuratively there comes an end to Judaism, of which Jerusalem is the capital. Afterwards a new Jerusalem will literally be built on the place where Jerusalem now is. This is a picture of the New Covenant. The thought is that the Old Covenant was fundamentally ended in the past at the first coming of Christ. The New Covenant over that same Israel, which once was under the law, will in the future be established over Israel and afterwards over the nations at the coming again of Christ. What in the past ought to have ended still exists and we live in it.

Child and servant under the New Covenant

We expect for the future the revelation of the Kingdom of Christ and the breaking in of the New Covenant over Israel and over the Church in connection with the Jerusalem which shall then be. The Jerusalem which shall then be has existed for a long time. Ever since the resurrection of Christ. It is the picture of the New Covenant and that has long since begun. Not so much in connection with earthly things, but in connection with heavenly things. Not in connection with a revealed kingdom, but in connection with a hidden kingdom. We live in a time in which those two concepts overlap. The Old Covenant is still in force, not on God’s part, but man chooses for it, and at the same time the New has fully begun. The practical application is that we should choose whom we will serve. That we should choose whether we will serve under the law or under the grace of the New Covenant. Whether we will live in slavery, because we are after all Christians, or whether we will live in liberty, for the same reason. The whole outside world thinks that Christians are people who live in a small world with narrow patterns of what one may or may not do and who are expected to have to do certain things. That is why many do not want to be Christians, for then they would have to keep those rules and laws. On the contrary, Christianity is precisely deliverance, liberty. We have precisely been made free in order under the leading of the Spirit of God and under the working of Christ in us to serve the living God, the Church and one another through love. “For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve

one another” (Galatians 5:13). That is the position of the believer, of Isaac.
We ought to warm to the Jerusalem which is above, for that is the mother of us all. There we are at home. There our life, our citizenship finds its origin. The Jewish people living under the law belong at home in the Jerusalem which now is, and the Christian who lives under the law also. Hence so many Christians warm to the present Jewish state. There they belong, under the law. Just as Jerusalem on earth will be the seat of the high priest and the king, as it was also in the past, so the Jerusalem which is above is the seat of the High Priest and King of the New Covenant.

Galatians 4:28

28 Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.

Isaac was a child and would inherit; Ishmael would not. Whoever belongs to that Jerusalem which is below will not inherit. In short, whoever lives under the law has no inheritance, no reward. Whether he is a child of Abraham or a child of God makes no difference. He will not inherit. We who know that heavenly Jerusalem are expected to live in liberty. We are the promised children and shall therefore inherit, just as Isaac did. That name means laughter. It speaks of the joy of the glad tidings, the gospel, the New Covenant. Joy because of the liberty and the deliverance.

Galatians 4:29

29 But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.

The history in Genesis 21 tells us that Ishmael mocked Isaac. It is still the case that the one who lives under the law is stronger than the one who lives in liberty. Persecution comes from those who live under the law. It cannot be otherwise, for those who live in liberty pay no attention to anything. Why would they, being free, persecute another? We who are ourselves free also grant others liberty. We would not persecute others, but rather bring the gospel. That is a message of deliverance and therefore not one of persecution. Where one comes with a Bible in one hand and a sword in the other, as was regularly the custom in history, the Bible must have been opened at the law and certainly not at the gospel.

Galatians 4:30

30 Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.

This statement connects directly with Galatians 5:12: “I would they were even cut off which trouble you!” Those “you” are the ones like Isaac and those who trouble are the ones like Ishmael. The servants, those who live in slavery under the law, would be cast out. In another place it says that their mouths must be stopped (Titus 1:11). Note well that the law says that the bondwoman and her son must be cast out.

Galatians 4:31

31 So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.

Living under the New Covenant

Galatians 5:1

1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

The same truth is here applied in at least a twofold way. The one doctrinal application concerns the Jewish people under the law in the dispensation of the law (no. 4). It stands in contrast with the Church in the fifth dispensation, living under the New Covenant and therefore under the lordship of grace. In this letter it is set out that we not only know this truth, but that we should also live from it. The other application is that the difference made between Judaism and Christianity is also made within the Church. That means that we are dealing with a situation that corresponds with the situation within Israel. Israel was originally called to be a people of priests only, a priestly people. Within the people, however, there certainly existed a distinction, whereby a difference was made between priests and those who were not. For those who did not belong to that people, the whole of Israel consisted of priests. Within the people only a part were priests. The same difference is also made within the Church. The Church is a people of priests, just as Israel was. That does not, however, take away the fact that within the Church there certainly exists a distinction, just as there is a difference within Israel. The statement that the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman (Galatians 4:30) is a statement that is first applied to the Church and the Jewish people, but afterwards the statement is applied within the Church to believers. The intention is that we who have a share in that priestly people should also actually live as priests or in the future actually be appointed as sons and therefore as priests and kings. Individually, that is to be understood. We all belong to the United Kingdom, but we are not all kings. We have entered it, but that does not mean we inherit it. If the world were by chance ruled by the British, then the whole population would consist of kings, a royal people because it rules the whole world, but that still does not mean that every member of that people has a share in that rule.

Think here of the parable of the pounds (Luke 19:11–27). In it the servants are assigned different responsibilities with the intention that they should make profit or do business until the Lord came again. The result was that some had earned something extra with the consequence that they received a greater function in the kingdom. One received ten cities, another five, and another was for punishment made mayor of Bolsward… There was also one, and that is of course the essence of the parable, who had done no business at all. He therefore received no reward and no crown, but he did enter the kingdom. He belonged to the servants. Only he did not fall into the category of the good and faithful servants. He was indeed a servant, made competent to be a servant of the New Covenant, but he did not practise his competence. The Scripture speaks about such matters in this letter to the Galatians. We now turn to Hebrews. There we find exactly the same exposition in a similar connection, only with a few different expressions. The letter to the Hebrews speaks about the difference between the ordinances of the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. It says that we are free from the law and that we should come

with boldness to the High Priest of the New Covenant and therefore to the throne of grace, in order under the leading of this High Priest to serve the living God and thereby one another.
God spoke in the past to the fathers by the prophets. That was under the law. In these last days God has spoken by the Son (Hebrews 1:1), who is seated on the throne of grace, through whom we have been made free. In that liberty we should live. We all live under that same New Covenant and the intention is that under that New Covenant the Church of today should be gathered and built up. That is the thrust of both Galatians and Hebrews.

> Hebrews 10:19, 22
> 19 Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,
> 22 Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

As is to be read in the preceding chapters, when we enter the sanctuary we come to the throne of grace. It is so called because Someone is seated on it, namely the Son, the King, the Firstborn, the High Priest of the New Covenant. The nice thing is that the High Priest is of course responsible for the service to God, for the official religion. That was so under the Old Covenant and it is also so under the New Covenant. When we are therefore called to draw near to the throne of grace, it is in order under the lordship of the One who sits on the throne to serve God. We should do that with boldness, for the simple reason that we have been made competent to be ministers of the New Covenant (2 Corinthians 3:6). The question is of course whether we make use of that competence. We have been made competent to have a share in the inheritance, the reward of the saints in light, the light of the New Covenant (Colossians 1:12). We are born again and on that ground priests. Just as the priest under the Old Covenant was priest on the ground of birth, by virtue of his perishable life, so we are priests by virtue of incorruptible life (Hebrews 7:16). That in itself is not sufficient. It is not a question of whether we are priests or not. The question is whether we function as priests and whether we actually serve the living God (Hebrews 9:14). If we want to do that, we draw near to that High Priest in order to make ourselves available to Him or to present our bodies a living, holy, well-pleasing sacrifice to God, for that is our reasonable service (Romans 12:1). We should make ourselves available as priest; that word is not added.

> Hebrews 10:24
> 24 And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works;

The practising of this New Testament priestly task produces love and good works. “Use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another” (Galatians 5:13). Let us draw near, fulfil our priestly task and consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works. Love stands for fellowship and good works can only be those works which promote fellowship. Good works are in the New Testament mentioned exclusively to indicate those works which proceed from faith. Good works are the works

which contribute to the work of God, or rather the work of Christ in our days. There is only one good work in our days and that is the work which God does, the building of the Church, the gathering of a people for His Name. When the term then stands in the plural, it can be nothing other than works which contribute to the forming and building up of the Church. That is therefore also called in Ephesians 4:12 “the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ”. It will be clear that those works have everything to do with the promotion of the unity of the Church as such.

> Hebrews 10:25–27
> 25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.
> 26 For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins,
> 27 But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.

It concerns drawing near to the throne of grace, for there we meet one another. With the Lord, with Christ in our service to Him. The more we pursue the service of the Lord, the more we want to serve Him and the more we also know ourselves to be bound together with one another. Some forsake that assembling of themselves together. They have been made competent to be ministers of the New Covenant, but make no use of that competence. The thought is that good works go through the fire and are preserved from it. Evil works on the other hand will not withstand the fire and will be burned
(1 Corinthians 3:15).

Hebrews 10:34–36
34 For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.
35 Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward.
36 For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.

It concerns the boldness to enter into the sanctuary, the boldness to draw near to the throne of grace. Boldness in spite of the fact that we are by nature sinners and to a certain extent remain so. Although we by nature undoubtedly think that we cannot serve God at all, because we are not fit for it, God says that He has made us competent to be ministers of the New Covenant (2 Corinthians 3:6). To that end He has not taken away our sins as such and He does not prevent them either. Not our flesh, but our consciences has He cleansed from dead works (Hebrews 9:14). If He says it, let us then with boldness place ourselves under the leading of the High Priest and King. We know that if we serve Him under that leading, we have a better and an enduring substance, an incorruptible and unfading inheritance in heaven (1 Peter 1:4). The promise consists of the better and enduring substance in heaven mentioned above, or a great recompence of reward.

Hebrews 10:38–39

38 Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.

39 But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.

To live from faith means to live in dependence on the Lord and to serve Him. The faith from which the just shall live is faith in the promises which God has made for the future. If anyone draws back from that access to the throne of grace, from the assembling of ourselves together, that is not according to the will of God.

Living under the lordship of grace

Hebrews 12:1

1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.

The thought is that through our practical life we should serve the living God, with the result a better and an enduring substance in heaven, a great recompence of reward, a promise, an inheritance, a crown. All this concerns living under grace, under the leading and lordship of grace under the New Covenant. Just as Moses through the law ruled over those who are under the law, so Christ through grace rules over those who are under grace. Just as there were then people disobedient to Moses (Hebrews 10:28), so there are also now in our days people who are disobedient to Christ. Stronger still, there are those who imagine they are obedient to the law of Moses, but are thereby disobedient to Christ. This line of thought from Hebrews 10 goes straight on into Hebrews 12. Hebrews 11 gives an explanation of the question what living from faith looks like. If, however, you begin to say how that must be done, you place the believer again under the law and he has once more become a slave and unfree. You can therefore never tell anyone how he must live from faith. What can be done is to cite examples of others who have lived from faith. Various examples are given from the lives of persons from Old Testament history. We know part of them, but especially the last part we do not know. This chapter gives illustrations of what that life from faith can look like. It always means that one trusts in the promises which God has made and in the Word of God.

Hebrews 12:2

2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

For every one of us that race is different, yet it is always a race of faith. Not looking unto Moses but unto Christ. Not looking unto the high priest of the Old Covenant but unto the High Priest of the New Covenant. Not looking at all those serpents down here in the wilderness by which we die, but looking unto the lifted-up Serpent of John 3:14. Just as with Jesus, joy is also set before us. The result of the patience of Christ is that He has a better and an enduring substance in heaven. That He has received a great

recompence of reward. That He has obtained the promise made to Him. For He has been appointed Son, King, Priest and Firstborn. And therefore He is seated on the throne, or as it is stated here, at the right hand of the throne of God. We should follow His example, so that we might have a share in His glory.

Hebrews 12:3

3 For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

The practical outworking of life—the soul—can faint as a result of the contradiction of sinners. Through that unfaithfulness a believer does not lose eternal life, for that is incorruptible. The body, however, can be lost. Many faint because of the contradiction of sinners, precisely because they want to preserve the body.

Hebrews 12:4–7

4 Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

5 And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:

6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

7 If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?

Everyone who can rejoice in the love of the Lord is chastened or educated by Him. That does not take away the fact that precisely because we are children, we as children of God must learn to serve God our Father also in practice. He will appoint sons, but before that happens they must prove suitable; otherwise they simply remain children. Where we are conscious of His chastening, of the fact that things do not always go smoothly but that our faith is built up through it, we should also be conscious that God deals with us as with sons.

Hebrews 12:8

8 But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.

Suppose now that our life went smoothly. Where we have known no problems in life, we have also not learned to overcome them. We have also not learned to bear responsibility and the Father will not appoint us as His heirs. In addition, the term “bastards” here is not the expression used to indicate illegitimate children. From ancient times it has been the designation of children from the bondwoman. Not from the wife, the official wife, but from the bondwoman. The term bastard is by definition applicable to Ishmael, the one who does not inherit. So you see that here again it concerns exactly the same things. It could also have said: so are ye sons from the bondwoman and not from the freewoman. This line is also followed in Galatians 4.

Hebrews 12:9

9 Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?

The purpose of our fleshly upbringing is that we should become adults and be able to bear and endure. That we should gain sufficient experience in our childhood years to be able to bear the responsibility that awaits us. If we are children of God, He will educate us to be sons and that does not happen without falling and rising again or without chastening. When we as children of God get into difficulties, in whatever way, the intention is that we should face those difficulties in a biblical and spiritual way. That we should not make our decisions on the ground of human reasoning, but on the ground of the Word and the promises of God. The most important thing in our life should be that we are faithful to Him. That we must learn. To be faithful to the Lord means nothing if no pressure is exerted upon us from the outside to bring us to unfaithfulness. Where we want to be faithful to the Lord, the devil is always out to bring us to unfaithfulness. Believers often make compromises and that is perhaps just as much unfaithfulness. That does not mean that we should never make compromises. On occasion it will appear that we cannot do otherwise. That must not, however, be the basis of our practical life. We should in the first place be faithful to Him and that undoubtedly brings with it that we shall gather no honour here in the world. It is, however, about the fact that we shall not be rewarded by the world, but that God is the One who will judge us in the future (1 Corinthians 4:4). We should look to that. It may well be that God allows certain things in our life to train us. So that we should learn to overcome certain things and to make the right decisions. Our education does not stop when we officially come of age. We continue to learn. We certainly do, for we have eternal life and that means that the greatest part is still to come.

> Hebrews 12:10
> 10 For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.

“Profit” in the Bible always means edification. The Lord chastens us unto sanctification. Are we then not holy? Yes, as to the spirit we are holy, but at the rapture of the Church we shall be holy as to the body. 1 Peter 1:15 says: “Be ye holy in all manner of conversation.” God chastens us so that we might be partakers of His holiness. So that we might experience and face the same things as He did. So that on the one hand we might be tempted just as the Lord Jesus was, but might learn to resist that temptation, namely to endure unbelief or the contradiction of sinners.

> Hebrews 12:11
> 11 Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

We are on the way to the joy that the Lord has set before us. Education does not seem to be a matter of joy, but yet it is. A child realises beforehand insufficiently what adult life will look like in the future, simply because he lacks that experience. That is why there are others who must motivate him to learn. There are many things that are difficult to learn and yet we often learn them. It costs us time, money and/or effort, but we

gladly want to learn something specific. When we have once learned it, we are glad about it, often for the rest of our life.
Since we do not know what it will be like in the future, except in general lines, it is the Lord who educates us according to His insight for that future destiny. The more we see through the Word the joy that is set before us, the more it will motivate us in our daily practical life and in not avoiding difficulties. In order to remain faithful to the Lord and under all circumstances to choose for Him. However difficult that may be. The chance is great that where we judge or criticise one another's lives from human principles, tradition and culture, it brings us in most cases to the wrong decisions. Simply because our lives do not derive their value from the norms that apply in society, but from the future. We do not judge children on the ground of whether they meet the demands that must be placed on adults, but whether we have the expectation that they will one day prove suitable for the future responsibility. That is what it is about for the believer.

> Hebrews 12:14–15a
> 14 Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:
> 15a Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God;

Grace and peace are the characteristics of the New Covenant. Where the Old Covenant is strife and law, the New Covenant is peace, fellowship and grace. The term peace in the original text originally has the meaning of oneness, of joining together. "Follow then peace or fellowship" (Hebrews 12:14) or "I beseech you that ye would endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit" (Ephesians 4:3). One should pursue the characteristics and qualities of the New Covenant.
The expression "without which no man shall see the Lord" can be confusing. "See" is in the Bible also often used in the meaning of "have fellowship with". 1 John 1:7 says: "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light…" This sentence could end with: "then we see one another." That is not what it says; it says that "we have fellowship one with another." If we have no fellowship with one another, we say in English that we do not see each other. The expression "Jesus… crowned with glory and honour" (Hebrews 2:9) means that we have a share in Him. The verse is moreover in the future tense. That does not mean that this verse concerns the future. Future tense is also used to indicate that what is mentioned proceeds from what precedes. The thought is that where that holiness is, we shall see the Lord. Not in the future, but now. Where holiness is we have fellowship with Him, we have a share in His holiness. That is why the apostle says that it is only about one thing: to know Him and the power of His resurrection (Philippians 3:10). It is about the fact that we should walk in fellowship with Him.
It concerns practical things here, for how can one in the practice of life walk in fellowship with someone one does not know? That is of course stated very black and white. Where we come to know Him from the Scripture, we shall also know Him or involve Him in our walk. The intention is that on the one hand we should come to know the Lord by learning to understand His Word and on the other hand from experience. James

begins with: “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations” (James 1:2). From that comes life experience, learning from practice. That is what that trial or temptation is for. “That ye may be perfect and entire…” (James 1:4).

> James 1:5a
> 5 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not;

It therefore does not say that one should acquire wisdom in practice. Both practical and theoretical knowledge are mentioned in this portion. Those two ought to form one whole. Where we come to holiness, where the work of the Holy Spirit works in us, we come to knowledge of Him and shall see Him. So that we have a share in Him, also in the practice of our life. It is about the fact that we should live in fellowship with Him and that goes together with this holiness.

> Hebrews 12:15–19
> 15 Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;
> 16 Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.
> 17 For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.
> 18 For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest,
> 19 And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more.

Galatians and Hebrews speak about the same thing. Only Galatians speaks about Ishmael in contrast with Isaac and Hebrews about a generation later, namely Esau in contrast with Jacob. Esau who by nature was the firstborn, not even from the bondwoman but from the freewoman, did not value that. He had no interest in those promises. They are after all not fulfilled in this life. He sold for one morsel of meat—what has to do with his earthly life—the right of his birthright. Where we forsake the assembling of ourselves together, we are a fornicator or profane person as Esau. Where we neglect to make our lives available to the High Priest, we in practice relinquish our personal birthright. Then there is no better and enduring substance in heaven, no great recompence of reward. Then we shall not obtain the promise and there is no saving of the soul. In short, then we have lost the birthright. Of course Esau was blessed. He was the son of Isaac and therefore received blessings. It is, however, about that birthright. That did not go to Esau, but to Jacob. These things are applied to the members of the Church as individuals.

That “mount that might be touched” is Sinai, the mountain in Arabia from Galatians 4, but then in a figurative sense. Directly after this verse it says that they could not bear the words of the law. That appeared when Moses carried them and let them fall from his hands. Here it states what we do

not have. Not the law, not Sinai, not tempest, not darkness and no words that one cannot bear.

> Hebrews 12:22
> 22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels.

What we do have is dealt with in this verse. We have come to the untouchable mount Sion. We have not come to the Jerusalem which now is, nor to the Jerusalem which shall be in the future, but to the Jerusalem which is above, which is the mother of us all (Galatians 4:26). We now have a share in the already hidden Kingdom. The Kingdom that shall only be revealed in the future. We have come to the city of the living God. The city of David who is dead is the Jerusalem which now is, below. The city of the living God is the Jerusalem which is above, where not the Son of David but the Son of God sits on the throne. As Son of David He will sit on the throne in the future Jerusalem. In the present Jerusalem the law rules. That is why we are set in the heavenlies and have a share in the city and the Kingdom of the living God, instead of the dead David. We have come to the innumerable company of angels. Angels are heavenly beings and we have received a share in that.

> Hebrews 12:23
> 23 To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.

The general assembly is a Greek term for the popular assembly. A popular assembly that bears governmental responsibility consists of kings, of sons, of firstborns. Within Israel there also existed such a general assembly, namely the Jewish high council under the presidency of the high priest. That council consisted exclusively of priests and because they formed part of the high council they were called chief priests. In ancient Greek the ecclesia or church is the same as the popular assembly or the general assembly. Called out from the people to have a share in the popular assembly is what has happened to us. We have been chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4) and thereby predestinated to be appointed as sons in the future.

> Romans 5:1–3
> 1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:
> 2 By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.
> 3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;

This speaks about our position as the Church. We stand in grace because we have been saved by grace. We still have continual access to that same grace. For we need it not only to be born again, but also on that ground to serve the living God in the practice of our life (Hebrews 9:14). We glory in this, that the glory of God will in the future be revealed to us. Where we have set our expectation on these coming things, it naturally brings suffering with it. Nevertheless the following verses set out that we, now

that we are justified by His blood (verse 9), shall be saved from wrath. That wrath is not only the coming wrath in the days of the coming again of Christ, but the wrath under which the whole of mankind lives in our days (Romans 1:18). Where we are born again, that is, have received the Spirit of God, we shall in our life be saved from this wrath under which the natural man lives. We are delivered from this present evil age (Galatians 1:4) and placed in the age to come. We are delivered from it because we walk in the light of God's Word and the light of God's Spirit, namely Christ. That includes that we know where we have come from and where we are going. It is characteristic of mankind that it does not know where it has come from and where it must go (John 12:35).

> Romans 6:1–2
> 1 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?
> 2 God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?

In the preceding verse, Romans 5:21, it is established that we formerly lived under the lordship of sin and death, but now live under the lordship of grace. Grace in order to be able to live godly (2 Timothy 3:12). We should not, however, continue in sin and serve sin, but we should serve righteousness. Instead of presenting our bodies as instruments of unrighteousness, we should present them as weapons of righteousness (Romans 6:13). The other question that could be asked is whether we should remain under the law, for the law is after all righteousness, many think. To a certain extent that is true. The thought is, however, that we should not live under the law, because a life under the law is in practice a life that is in bondage to sin. Where the law rules, sin rules.

> Romans 6:14–15
> 14 For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.
> 15 What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid.

Serving the law is therefore not serving righteousness. What we should do is set out in Romans 8. There it still connects at the beginning with Romans 7, namely that the flesh cannot submit itself to the law of God. That proves to be an impossibility. Afterwards it is said that we should not submit ourselves to the law, but to the Spirit. That is the term that is then introduced in verse 2. There the law is set in contrast with the Spirit.

Living under the lordship of the Spirit

> Romans 8:2
> 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

This concerns the New Covenant, for that is a ministration of the Spirit. The short version of verse 2 reads: the New Covenant has made me free from the Old. That is free from the lordship of the law and therefore also from the lordship of sin, for those two things cannot be separated. The concept of Spirit is then further explained.

Romans 8:4–8

4 That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

5 For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.

6 For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

8 So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

Bear in mind that sin and law always concern fleshly things, namely the old man. It is enmity against God. To be spiritually minded is life and peace. Both life and peace presuppose fellowship.

Romans 8:9–10

9 But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

10 And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

That is not a statement about the practical walk of life of the Romans, but about the position of the believer, who has after all received the Spirit of God. That is the same as that he is born again. For he is born again of the Spirit. What the Spirit brings forth is spirit (John 3:6). The receiving of the Spirit is nothing other than being born of the Spirit, receiving new life. The body should not serve sin, but the Spirit in us should serve righteousness. That happens, incidentally, through the body, but it is the Spirit of God who effects that.

Romans 8:11

11 But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.

In shortened form it says: “If the Spirit of God dwells in you, then God will also quicken your mortal bodies.” In the intervening sentences it is explained that that Spirit once raised the Lord Jesus from the dead. That same God, that same Spirit and that same power made the body of Jesus alive. Well then, says the apostle, if that Spirit dwells in you, He will also quicken your bodies. The question is then when. Since it is written in the future tense, there are always people who think that this will happen in the future. They then refer to the resurrection from the dead in the future. There is, however, a great misunderstanding in that. It may be grammatically future tense, but that does not mean that these things will only happen in the future. The future tense also has the meaning of drawing a conclusion. If the one is true then on that ground… it follows that…. That does not automatically concern the future.

From the context it also appears that it concerns the present. Where that Spirit of God, Christ Himself, dwells in us, that Spirit will also quicken our mortal bodies. This moreover cannot refer to the resurrection of the dead in the future, for then it could not have said “your mortal bodies”. Then it would have had to say “your now dead bodies”. Mortal bodies are indeed

still living bodies. The thought is that our bodies are quickened while they are still mortal. Anticipating the resurrection from the dead. That is why it concerns the present. The Spirit who raised Christ from the dead also now raises us from the dead. That is also what Paul speaks about in Philippians 3:11–12: “If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead… but I follow after, if that I may apprehend…” People then read that as if it concerns the Last Day or the rapture of the Church. The apostle is in reality speaking about the working of the life of Christ in him at that time. While he is of course still in this mortal body.
How then should we live? Under the lordship of sin? No. Under the lordship of the law? No. We should live under the lordship of the Spirit who dwells in us. Only lordship is a strong word that is not used here either. A synonym is used, namely under the leading of the Spirit. That comes to the same thing. If something rules in our life, the expression means that it has the greatest power in our life. Lordship of the law presupposes that the law is the highest power in our life. Lordship of Christ presupposes that He is the highest Power in our life. That does not mean that the others are no longer there, but they no longer have the greatest power. Of course sin works in us and death works in us, but that does not mean that sin or death rules in us. What should rule in us as believers is the life of Christ.

> Romans 8:12–13
> 12 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.
> 13 For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

The thought is that that Spirit should rule in our lives, whereby the deeds of the body are ignored and to a certain extent put out of action. The intention is that not we should do that, but that the Spirit should do it. As Paul says in Ephesians 5:18: “Be filled with the Spirit” or in Colossians 3:16: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly…” The responsibility for the working of the Spirit lies with us. We should make ourselves available to that Spirit.

> Romans 8:14
> 14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

Note that it does not say “shall be”. It concerns the present. Not led by law, sin, or flesh, but by the Spirit of God. Sons are led by the Spirit of the Father. For it is the life of God in us (the divine nature, Peter would say in 2 Peter 1:4) that does something with us. It is the Spirit who wants to lead us. Where that happens, we are sons of God. That does not mean that we have already been appointed as sons. It means that God deals with us as sons and that we as children also behave towards God as sons. On that ground we shall in the future be appointed as sons. We must not confuse these things and draw premature conclusions from one loose sentence from a complete portion of Scripture.

Appointment as sons

Romans 8:15

15 For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

The term “adoption” should here also be translated as sonship. The Spirit therefore has everything to do with our appointment as sons. Where we are led by the Spirit, we are sons of God, and where we are sons of God, we shall in the future be appointed as sons. The Spirit is not there to help us through life in a decent manner, but works in us to bring us to appointment as sons.

Romans 8:17

17 And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

In the verse above the word “children” is correctly translated. We still are that officially now. We are heirs and therefore destined to inherit, just as Esau was (Hebrews 12:16–17). Because we are children, we are heirs of God and therefore joint-heirs with Christ. He has been appointed Son of God. He has received the birthright and has been set as King, Priest and Firstborn. We are called to the same. To that end we have become children of God. In order subsequently to be educated and in the future to be appointed as sons. The Spirit does that work of education and not the law. The way of the Lord Jesus to His appointment as Son was a way of suffering. A way of living from faith. That is also expected of us: faithfulness to our heavenly Father. In that sense there is a comparison between the Lord Jesus and us. He was born of God, lived on earth as Child of God and was on the ground of proven faithfulness and obedience appointed as Son. The same can be said of us, although in practice it is different. We are also children of God. We are also born of God. The intention is that after proven faithfulness we should also be appointed as sons. Just as the Lord was called to that, so we are also called to it, for in Christ we were foreordained to sonship (Ephesians 1:5).

Romans 8:18

18 For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

Literally it says: for I reckon with this. The sufferings of this present time naturally refer to serving Him as a child of God. It concerns the chastening of Hebrews 12:11, which does not seem to be a matter of joy, but works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory (2 Corinthians 4:17). Note that word “weight”. In this verse it says that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared, do not outweigh… Value is determined by weighing. The term glory is a summary of all that we shall receive in the future because of that appointment as sons: glory, reward, inheritance, sonship, birthright, etc. The verse does not here speak about glory that we shall receive in the future, but that we now receive glory and that that glory will in the future be revealed. Something cannot be revealed if it is not there earlier. That happens at our appointment as sons, therefore at the redemption of our body (Romans 8:23). In so far as that glory is there, it will be revealed. The thought is

that that glory should not only be shown to us, but also to the world. The Scripture also speaks of it as an outward glory. Glory is synonymous with light and we shall have a more or less luminous form in that glorified body. It is a glory that is not seen here on earth in the fleshly body, but in the future it will be made visible. Both Christ and the Church will appear in glory and be revealed to the world. The revelation of Jesus Christ (Revelation 1:1) is just as much the revelation of the Church to the world.

> Romans 8:19
> 19 For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.

The word “creature” should actually be translated as “creation”. Creation is feminine and stands in contrast with the Man, namely the Creator. The woman should serve the Man just as creation should serve the Creator. In this verse it says that creation waits for the moment when we, sons of God, shall be manifested in the future. Then the glory will be seen by creation in us. That happens as sons of God and not as children, as it is translated here. The explanation follows in:

> Romans 8:20
> 20 For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope,

Who subjected that creation to vanity? The translators have held to the view that the devil did that; otherwise they would have written the word “him” with a capital letter. It could also have been printed with a capital letter, for God Himself willed it so. Creation was subjected to vanity; we were not. We are not vain (empty), but filled with the Spirit of God. Through that our practical life should bear fruit. The old creation can bear no fruit. It has become unprofitable and gone out of the way (Romans 3:12).

> Romans 8:21
> 21 Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Here “children” is again correctly translated. It does not make much difference here whether it says sons or children. The thought is that we who are now children of God live under the liberty of the New Covenant. Not bound to the power of death, sin or the law, but placed in liberty. In that position we receive glory. Both concepts, liberty and glory, lead to the result that that glory will in the future be revealed. Then it is no longer the glory of the children of God, but of those who were formerly children of God and have meanwhile been appointed as sons. Hence it does not matter any longer in this verse. In that liberty we learn to live as sons of God. The problem with liberty is that it essentially does not exist. Every human being is always bound to something. Only we limit the concept of liberty and then mean that where man is not bound to things imposed upon him, to laws in general, man is free. It is, however, a superficial indication. In reality we are all in any case bound to our own nature, through which we do things we do not want to do and do not do things we would so gladly have done. In the same way free-thinkers also do not exist. Thinking is always bound to a framework of thought, to the

information one has, the environment in which one moves, and to the man himself. An animal is generally considered to be free. That is not true. The behaviour of an animal is completely predictable, because the beast is bound to its own nature. If you as a human being are clever, you make use of that. An animal is free in the sense that no law is laid upon it, but nevertheless bound to what was written in the nature of the animal.
That is precisely the difference between the Old and the New Covenant. The Old Covenant lays down laws and that is simply slavery. The New Covenant concerns a law written within, the life of Christ in us, through which we are free because nothing is imposed upon us. On the outside there is nothing that obliges us to anything at all. As children of God we are free, but nevertheless bound by the life of Christ in us. Liberty, incidentally, has no meaning at all when one does not want to bear responsibility. Where one is free, one will have to make one's own decisions and thereby bear one's own responsibility. Many people (by which the natural man is meant) are so heavily bound because they are not able to bear their own responsibilities. The decisions they must make in life they shift onto others. The problem with believers is that many live under the law. Not because that is stated in the Bible, but because it takes away their responsibility. When people are asked what they believe, they say: "I am this or I am that." By that they mean that their name is written on some list somewhere. What they actually believe, you do not discover, for that is in practice often nothing. If one believes something, holds something for true, that is only meaningful when one also lives from it. One lives from it when one uses the things one holds for true as norms for practical life. That means that one makes one's decisions on the ground of what one believes. That is a living faith, says James. If that is not there, there may well be faith, but it is dead, being alone (James 2:17). Then it means nothing in the practice of life.
The thought is that we have been called unto liberty. That also means that we do not live under a law that tells us what we should do and not do, so that we do not have to bear our own responsibility. Where we stand in liberty, we shall have to make our own decisions. Not those imposed upon us, but those that come from within. We should also bear responsibility for them. In practice it is not so bad, for if all is well the Spirit lives in us and we let ourselves be filled by the Word. That will undoubtedly have its effect on our life. Where we learn to live in that liberty, where we as children of God learn to bear responsibility, we are fit to be appointed as sons. In proportion as we bear responsibility here, we are therefore sons, although we are still officially children. Where there is no liberty, one bears no responsibility and where no responsibility is borne, life is often rather simple.

> Romans 8:22–23
> 22 For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.
> 23 And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.

Here “children” should again be translated as “sons”. For we expect the appointment as sons. The world waits for that and in the last instance we ourselves are mentioned. The appointment as son takes place at the redemption of our body. The translators have not added “on the occasion of” the redemption of our body, but “to wit” the redemption of our body. That is correct, for it means that both terms have the same meaning. “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle (our body) were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Corinthians 5:1). There we shall be clothed, overclothed or found naked
(2 Corinthians 5:3–4), for we must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10). We therefore have the appointment as son, the redemption of our body and the manifestation before the judgment seat of Christ. That is three times the same thing. The visible in us is done away and the invisible remains. That invisible will then in the future be made manifest to the world. The glory of the body is/becomes now already our portion. We are now led by the Spirit to that appointment as son.

> Romans 8:24a
> 24 For we are saved by hope…

The life of a child is not the normal life of a human being. It is directed towards adulthood. A child must learn all kinds of things, particularly to bear responsibility, so that later, free from the lordship of the parents, it can cope with life. So it is also with us as believers. This is not the normal life. We are on the way to it. We are here in this life as believers prepared for the life that has been promised to us. Serving God has in the first place the goal of our own maturity. If our service to the Lord produces no practical and visible result at all in the visible world, even then our service to Him can bear fruit, because it leads to our sonship. If an evangelist preaches the gospel all his life and through that gospel preaching no one comes to faith all his life, the man has served his heavenly Father. He will have learned a great deal, in any case to bear responsibility. He could just as well have said: “Nothing is happening, so I shall stop.” In our life it is not about as great a visible result as possible of our service to Him, but that we learn to be faithful to Him, regardless of the circumstances. Where we serve the Lord and our work bears much visible fruit, it is much easier to be faithful than where the work bears no visible fruit. Yet it is precisely about that.

Summarised, Romans 8 concerns our future appointment as sons. And to kick in an open door once more: sons can only be appointed if they first exist. The intention is that we should now grow up to be sons in order in the future to be appointed as sons. That is why in our whole life we should set our expectation on the coming again of Christ. In everything that happens to us in life we should keep our eye fixed on that, for that is what it is about. We hope for that which we do not see and we hope for it with patience.

> Romans 8:24b–26
> 24 …but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?

25 But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.
26 Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

It is about the fact that we should not live from the strength of the flesh. The thought is that we as children of God should live and that can only be in the strength of the Spirit who has been given to us to lead us to appointment as sons. He comes to help our natural infirmities. In our service under the New Covenant we should with boldness draw near to the throne of grace in order to receive grace, mercy and help (Hebrews 4:16). In the verses above it says that the Spirit helps our infirmities, but that concerns exactly the same thing. For that Spirit is Christ, the Mediator of the New Covenant. From Him we should receive help and in His strength we should serve the living God. Naturally under His leading and under His responsibility.

Romans 8:28–30
28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.
29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.
30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

What is that good? Our appointment as sons, of course. To that end all things must work together. That is the goal of our life. All things should work together for them who are called according to His purpose. To what were we called? That is again the same answer: to appointment as sons, foreordained. The expression in the first part of verse 29 corresponds with the statement in Ephesians 1:4–5, where it says that we have been chosen in Christ and therefore also foreordained in Christ to appointment as sons. The result is that when we are in the future appointed as sons, Christ is of course the Firstborn in the midst of many brethren. In the midst of others who share with Him in that birthright. The following verse then says in short: “whom he did predestinate, them he also called, justified and glorified.”

The relationship between Israel and the Church

In the previous chapter we went more deeply into the position of the Church. We have seen that we as children of God are predestinated to be appointed as sons, or in other words to become heirs with Christ and to share with Him in the birthright. In the Old Testament, however, we find that the birthright was promised to Israel and not to the Church (which is after all a mystery there). How can it be that the promises made to Israel in the Old Testament are in the New Testament ascribed to the Church? Asking the question wrongly means that it cannot be properly answered. For there is no question of either the one or the other. In our days promises that were indeed originally made to Israel are fulfilled in the

Church. That does not, however, exclude that those same promises will still be fulfilled to Israel in the future. We then remain with the question how it can be that promises made to Israel are fulfilled in our days to the Church. One thought is that where the birthright of Israel is spoken of, it concerns the birthright of Israel in the midst of the other nations on earth (and therefore in this old creation). Where the birthright is assigned to the Church, that happens not with respect to earthly circumstances but in connection with heavenly circumstances. For the Church of today is not an earthly people but a heavenly people. The other thought is that promises concerning birthright were not made to Judah or to the two tribes of Israel, but in particular to Ephraim and thereby the ten tribes of Israel.
It appears that, partly with reference to Romans 9 to 11, the birthright of the Church certainly rests on Old Testament prophecies. In these chapters many Old Testament prophecies are quoted and brought into connection with the Church in our days. It may be that the Church was a mystery in the Old Testament, but here that mystery is revealed to us. We are shown in what way Old Testament and Israelite statements prove to be Church statements. According to some that is a spiritualising of prophecy. That is to say that an allegorical application (symbolic representation) is given to these Old Testament prophecies. That is indeed the case, but it also excludes that these statements can also be considered literally. In addition, the people spoken of in Romans 9 to 11 is not so much the Church, but Israel. Not the known part of Israel, the Jewish people (the two tribes), but the unknown part, namely Ephraim or Joseph, in short the ten tribes of Israel. When it is spoken of an Ammi that shall become Lo-ammi and a Lo-ammi that shall become Ammi, it concerns the Jewish people that would not be God’s people and the ten tribes, Lo-ammi, that would become Ammi. They would become that through faith and thereby we come to the Church. That does not take away the fact that the historical and legal origin of the Church lies with the ten tribes of Israel in general and apparently with Ephraim in particular.

> Romans 10:19a
> 19 But I say, Did not Israel know? First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you.

Moses’ answer is the only real answer that can be given to the question. The Jewish people cannot be provoked to jealousy by Lo-ammi if Lo-ammi is the Church, for the Church is not Lo-ammi but Ammi. The Church is indeed God’s people. Yet it says that He would provoke to jealousy by Lo-ammi. The only solution to that problem is that Lo-ammi is not a designation of the Church but of the ten tribes of Israel. The one part of Israel will be provoked to jealousy by the Ephraimite part of Israel, namely the ten tribes. How then? By God legally begetting the Church out of that part of Israel. A people with birthrights, with a heavenly future. If that is not a cause for jealousy! In the past this has already become evident. The first Christian persecutions were begun by the Jews, sprung from the jealousy of the Jewish people.
Let anyone say how the Jewish people can be provoked to jealousy by a people that is not God’s people. That cannot be at all. It can only be

provoked to jealousy by a people that is indeed God’s people. More or less even in the place of that Jewish people. Yet it says Lo-ammi. That can only be when it is a reference to the other part of Israel. Both statements, Ammi as well as Lo-ammi, are statements concerning the people of Israel and therefore it can only be that this Lo-ammi is a designation of the ten tribes of Israel from which the Church would be begotten.

> Romans 10:20
> 20 But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me.

That is also a reference to those same ten tribes of Israel. They did not seek the Lord and did not ask after Him. They were without understanding, because they did not know the law or had rejected it. On that ground they were Lo-ammi, but they did come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The line of the birthright

By a literal path that birthright, as it was promised to Israel, has indeed come through Ephraim to the Church. That means that both in a literal and in a figurative way truths concerning Israel come to the Church. I take you along the line that is drawn in the Bible. It is a line concerning the birthright. It begins in Genesis. There we have to do with Adam of whom it is said that he would have dominion.

> Genesis 1:26
> 26 And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.
> Genesis 1:28
> 28 And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

That means that dominion over the earth was given to Adam. He was the first and he received dominion over the earth. Afterwards he multiplied himself. Then the question is to which of his sons this inheritance falls, namely the kingship over the earth. Who would be the one to whom this kind of promises were made? In Genesis 4 we are told of two sons of Adam who, as two sons perhaps ought, immediately quarrel. The one is jealous of the other and the jealous one slays the other. This is a foreshadowing of the first Christian persecutions by the Jews. It is somewhat premature to say so, but from the context of what follows it does appear that Cain is a type of the Jewish people. He would slay his brother. His brother is a type of the Lord Jesus in whom the Church is immediately included. When a curse is pronounced upon Cain, it proves to be a curse that in our days applies to the Jewish people.

> Genesis 4:10–15a
> 10 And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground.

11 And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand;
12 When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth.
13 And Cain said unto the LORD, My punishment is greater than I can bear.
14 Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me.
15a And the LORD said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.

Here we find the description of the position of the Jewish people in our days. The Lord hides His face from that people and the people is hidden from the Lord. This is what is later described in the prophecies, namely that the Lord would utterly hide His face from this people (Isaiah 8:17; Micah 3:4). That corresponds with the prophecies which say that the Jewish people would indeed be persecuted in our days, but that the Lord would nevertheless execute justice upon that same Jewish people. That the Lord has cast that Jewish people away from His face does not give the heathen nations the right therefore to persecute the Jews. The Lord will also avenge that Jewish people in the future.

Matthew 23:35
35 That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.

Of that Jewish people the blood of Abel would be required. That cannot of course be, because the Jewish people is not guilty of the blood of Abel. From this it appears that Cain is a type of that Jewish people.

Genesis 4:15b
15 …And the LORD set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him.

The word "lest" should be translated as "that". Cain was indeed persecuted, but not killed. The mark upon the Jewish people is that since New Testament history it has been persecuted through the centuries, but that it has nevertheless never been exterminated. In spite of the fact that extensive attempts were made to do so. That is the most remarkable sign there is. Humanly speaking the people would long since have ceased to exist. It would either have been assimilated, submerged in the other nations, or it would have been exterminated. That, however, has not happened and that points to the mark of Cain that we find with the Jewish people. The point is that Cain was the eldest son and normally speaking would have had to inherit from Adam. He would have been the son of man or the son of Adam. In reality he was not that, as the registers in the Old Testament show us. It was taken away from him. If Cain was not to be the heir, Abel would have to be, but he was slain.

Genesis 4:25
25 And Adam knew his wife again; and she bare a son, and called

his name Seth: For God, said she, hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew.

Abel, the slain one, is succeeded by Seth who receives the birthright above the birthright of Cain. This principle continues to play an important role throughout the whole Bible. It even plays a role in the history of Noah and his sons. With him we also find a similar phenomenon.

Genesis 5:32

32 And Noah was five hundred years old: and Noah begat Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

The line of the birthright ran of course through Noah, for he was after all the one who together with his sons survived the flood. Noah is thereby automatically the son of man, nicknamed the son of Adam. After Noah Shem is his heir. He, however, proved not to be the eldest. That was Japheth (Genesis 10:21). From Shem then Terah and afterwards Abraham proceeded. Here again not the eldest but the second receives the birthright. The line of heirs of Abraham who would rule over the earth is not drawn through the eldest son, but through the second.

Genesis 11:26

26 And Terah lived seventy years, and begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran.

Abram received that birthright, but he was not the eldest. He was many tens of years younger than his eldest brother. The eldest brother of Abraham was 60 years older than he. From that also flows another thought. Since Abraham’s nephew Lot was the son of Abraham’s eldest brother, Lot was according to human norms the firstborn and not his uncle Abraham. That explains why Abraham when dividing the land gives the first choice to Lot. He even possessed the birthright of Adam. Nevertheless the Lord shifts it here too and gives that birthright to Abraham. This is the unknown part of the history. Abraham begets two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. Ishmael, however, would not inherit with Isaac.

Genesis 21:10

10 Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac.

Typologically this is a simple truth. The son of the bondwoman is a picture of the Jewish people in our days, namely Israel living under the law. It is disinherited. That is to say that it does not in any case receive the birthright. The thought is then that the birthright instead comes to the Church. But it really concerns two brothers who come forth from the same father. If that birthright were taken away from the one son, it would be obvious that it would go to the other, namely that son who had never lived under the law and whose mother also had not lived under the law. If the son of the bondwoman is a picture of the Jewish people or the two tribes of Israel, then it is obvious that the son of the freewoman is a picture of the nations who descend from the ten tribes. If the one son, the Jewish people, is disinherited on account of the rejection of the gospel (rejection of the risen Christ), then it is obvious that that same gospel would in the first place be brought to the brother, namely to the ten tribes.

Isaac then begets continues. Although Jacob had several sons, the birthright did not go to the eldest son of his two sons, remarkably a twin. Not Esau but Jacob receives that birthright. Afterwards it first wife, but to the eldest son of his second wife.
The most important exchange we should still mention is that of Isaac and Laban. When the birthright is given by Isaac to Jacob instead of to Esau, Jacob flees to his uncle from the older branch of the family. The branch that according to human norms should actually have had the birthright. He marries there the daughter of uncle Laban. He thought he was marrying the youngest, but it became the eldest. The nice thing is that we here come across a double exchange. The first is the exchange of the birthright from Esau to Jacob. Through Jacob's flight to Laban we at the same time find the exchange of this branch of the family with the other branch of the family. Through the marriage with the daughters of uncle Laban Jacob became the son of Laban, for Laban had no further sons. Jacob who received the birthright from Isaac received in practice the birthright of Laban. The firstborn thus still came from that older branch of the family that had earlier in the days of Abraham been set aside.
Of whom or of what are Esau, Jacob and Laban a type? Every time there are two who are exchanged, it is no problem at all. The one from whom the birthright is taken away is Israel. By that is meant the Jewish people. The one to whom the birthright is given is then the Church. That is the most obvious and superficial reasoning in the New Testament. The Jewish people is set aside for the benefit of the Church. To a certain extent that is true. Esau is a picture of the Jewish people. Jacob is a picture of the Church and Laban is a picture of the ten tribes of Israel. That this is a picture of our dispensation is confirmed by the 20 years in which Jacob served uncle Laban in order afterwards to be reconciled with Esau. Those 20 years are undoubtedly a picture of the 2000 years of our dispensation. After those 2000 years the Jewish people will after all be saved, namely come to faith and even be reconciled with the Church. If we draw that line of typology through, it means that after the end of the 70th week reconciliation will come about between the Church and the Jewish people. For we shall appear with the Lord upon the Mount of Olives to the Jewish people.
There is still another story attached to it. The thought is that Israel is the bride of the Lord Himself. That does not take away the fact that in the Old Testament it is said that Israel would marry the sons of her own people (Isaiah 62:5). This bride question is rather complicated. The bride is to a certain extent Israel, but some prophecies concerning this matter prove in practice to concern the reunification between the Jewish people and the ten tribes on the one hand and on a higher level the unification between the whole of Israel and the Church on the other hand. The Church is then indeed involved in the wedding. Not because she is the bride, but because she is the bridegroom. Nevertheless it is said that the bridegroom comes forth from Israel. Where on the one hand there is spoken of a unification of the Church and Israel, on the other hand there is spoken of the unification of the two tribes and the ten tribes. If we then take the prophecies so literally as is customary in dispensationalism, then that points to the fact

that the Church must in some way literally come forth from (the ten tribes of) Israel. Both events are based on the same basic thought.

> Romans 8:19
> 19 For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.

The word “creature” should actually be translated as “creation”. Creation is feminine and stands in contrast with the Man, namely the Creator. The woman should serve the Man just as creation should serve the Creator. In this verse it says that creation waits for the moment when we, sons of God, shall be manifested in the future. Then the glory will be seen by creation in us. That happens as sons of God and not as children, as it is translated here. The explanation follows in:

> Romans 8:20
> 20 For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope,

Who subjected that creation to vanity? The translators have held to the view that the devil did that; otherwise they would have written the word “him” with a capital letter. It could also have been printed with a capital letter, for God Himself willed it so. Creation was subjected to vanity; we were not. We are not vain (empty), but filled with the Spirit of God. Through that our practical life should bear fruit. The old creation can bear no fruit. It has become unprofitable and gone out of the way (Romans 3:12).

> Romans 8:21
> 21 Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Here “children” is again correctly translated. It does not make much difference here whether it says sons or children. The thought is that we who are now children of God live under the liberty of the New Covenant. Not bound to the power of death, sin or the law, but placed in liberty. In that position we receive glory. Both concepts, liberty and glory, lead to the result that that glory will in the future be revealed. Then it is no longer the glory of the children of God, but of those who were formerly children of God and have meanwhile been appointed as sons. Hence it does not matter any longer in this verse. In that liberty we learn to live as sons of God. The problem with liberty is that it essentially does not exist. Every human being is always bound to something. Only we limit the concept of liberty and then mean that where man is not bound to things imposed upon him, to laws in general, man is free. It is, however, a superficial indication. In reality we are all in any case bound to our own nature, through which we do things we do not want to do and do not do things we would so gladly have done. In the same way free-thinkers also do not exist. Thinking is always bound to a framework of thought, to the information one has, the environment in which one moves, and to the man himself. An animal is generally considered to be free. That is not true. The behaviour of an animal is completely predictable, because the beast is bound to its own nature. If you as a human being are clever, you make

use of that. An animal is free in the sense that no law is laid upon it, but nevertheless bound to what was written in the nature of the animal. That is precisely the difference between the Old and the New Covenant. The Old Covenant lays down laws and that is simply slavery. The New Covenant concerns a law written within, the life of Christ in us, through which we are free because nothing is imposed upon us. On the outside there is nothing that obliges us to anything at all. As children of God we are free, but nevertheless bound by the life of Christ in us. Liberty, incidentally, has no meaning at all when one does not want to bear responsibility. Where one is free, one will have to make one's own decisions and thereby bear one's own responsibility. Many people (by which the natural man is meant) are so heavily bound because they are not able to bear their own responsibilities. The decisions they must make in life they shift onto others. The problem with believers is that many live under the law. Not because that is stated in the Bible, but because it takes away their responsibility. When people are asked what they believe, they say: "I am this or I am that." By that they mean that their name is written on some list somewhere. What they actually believe, you do not discover, for that is in practice often nothing. If one believes something, holds something for true, that is only meaningful when one also lives from it. One lives from it when one uses the things one holds for true as norms for practical life. That means that one makes one's decisions on the ground of what one believes. That is a living faith, says James. If that is not there, there may well be faith, but it is dead, being alone (James 2:17). Then it means nothing in the practice of life.

The thought is that we have been called unto liberty. That also means that we do not live under a law that tells us what we should do and not do, so that we do not have to bear our own responsibility. Where we stand in liberty, we shall have to make our own decisions. Not those imposed upon us, but those that come from within. We should also bear responsibility for them. In practice it is not so bad, for if all is well the Spirit lives in us and we let ourselves be filled by the Word. That will undoubtedly have its effect on our life. Where we learn to live in that liberty, where we as children of God learn to bear responsibility, we are fit to be appointed as sons. In proportion as we bear responsibility here, we are therefore sons, although we are still officially children. Where there is no liberty, one bears no responsibility and where no responsibility is borne, life is often rather simple.

> Romans 8:22–23
> 22 For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.
> 23 And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.

Here "children" should again be translated as "sons". For we expect the appointment as sons. The world waits for that and in the last instance we ourselves are mentioned. The appointment as son takes place at the redemption of our body. The translators have not added "on the occasion of" the redemption of our body, but "to wit" the redemption of our body.

That is correct, for it means that both terms have the same meaning. “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle (our body) were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Corinthians 5:1). There we shall be clothed, overclothed or found naked
(2 Corinthians 5:3–4), for we must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10). We therefore have the appointment as son, the redemption of our body and the manifestation before the judgment seat of Christ. That is three times the same thing. The visible in us is done away and the invisible remains. That invisible will then in the future be made manifest to the world. The glory of the body is/becomes now already our portion. We are now led by the Spirit to that appointment as son.

Romans 8:24a
24 For we are saved by hope…

The life of a child is not the normal life of a human being. It is directed towards adulthood. A child must learn all kinds of things, particularly to bear responsibility, so that later, free from the lordship of the parents, it can cope with life. So it is also with us as believers. This is not the normal life. We are on the way to it. We are here in this life as believers prepared for the life that has been promised to us. Serving God has in the first place the goal of our own maturity. If our service to the Lord produces no practical and visible result at all in the visible world, even then our service to Him can bear fruit, because it leads to our sonship. If an evangelist preaches the gospel all his life and through that gospel preaching no one comes to faith all his life, the man has served his heavenly Father. He will have learned a great deal, in any case to bear responsibility. He could just as well have said: “Nothing is happening, so I shall stop.” In our life it is not about as great a visible result as possible of our service to Him, but that we learn to be faithful to Him, regardless of the circumstances. Where we serve the Lord and our work bears much visible fruit, it is much easier to be faithful than where the work bears no visible fruit. Yet it is precisely about that.

Summarised, Romans 8 concerns our future appointment as sons. And to kick in an open door once more: sons can only be appointed if they first exist. The intention is that we should now grow up to be sons in order in the future to be appointed as sons. That is why in our whole life we should set our expectation on the coming again of Christ. In everything that happens to us in life we should keep our eye fixed on that, for that is what it is about. We hope for that which we do not see and we hope for it with patience.

Romans 8:24b–26
24 …but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?
25 But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.
26 Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself

maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

It is about the fact that we should not live from the strength of the flesh. The thought is that we as children of God should live and that can only be in the strength of the Spirit who has been given to us to lead us to appointment as sons. He comes to help our natural infirmities. In our service under the New Covenant we should with boldness draw near to the throne of grace in order to receive grace, mercy and help (Hebrews 4:16). In the verses above it says that the Spirit helps our infirmities, but that concerns exactly the same thing. For that Spirit is Christ, the Mediator of the New Covenant. From Him we should receive help and in His strength we should serve the living God. Naturally under His leading and under His responsibility.

Romans 8:28–30
28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.
29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.
30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

What is that good? Our appointment as sons, of course. To that end all things must work together. That is the goal of our life. All things should work together for them who are called according to His purpose. To what were we called? That is again the same answer: to appointment as sons, foreordained. The expression in the first part of verse 29 corresponds with the statement in Ephesians 1:4–5, where it says that we have been chosen in Christ and therefore also foreordained in Christ to appointment as sons. The result is that when we are in the future appointed as sons, Christ is of course the Firstborn in the midst of many brethren. In the midst of others who share with Him in that birthright. The following verse then says in short: “whom he did predestinate, them he also called, justified and glorified.”6. The relationship between Israel and the Church
In the previous chapter we went more deeply into the position of the Church. We have seen that we as children of God are predestinated to be appointed as sons, or in other words to become heirs with Christ and to share with Him in the birthright. In the Old Testament, however, we find that the birthright was promised to Israel and not to the Church (which is after all a mystery there). How can it be that the promises made to Israel in the Old Testament are in the New Testament ascribed to the Church? Asking the question wrongly means that it cannot be properly answered. For there is no question of either the one or the other. In our days promises that were indeed originally made to Israel are fulfilled in the Church. That does not, however, exclude that those same promises will still be fulfilled to Israel in the future. We then remain with the question how it can be that promises made to Israel are fulfilled in our days to the Church. One thought is that where the birthright of Israel is spoken of, it concerns the birthright of Israel in the midst of the other nations on earth

(and therefore in this old creation). Where the birthright is assigned to the Church, that happens not with respect to earthly circumstances but in connection with heavenly circumstances. For the Church of today is not an earthly people but a heavenly people. The other thought is that promises concerning birthright were not made to Judah or to the two tribes of Israel, but in particular to Ephraim and thereby the ten tribes of Israel.
It appears that, partly with reference to Romans 9 to 11, the birthright of the Church certainly rests on Old Testament prophecies. In these chapters many Old Testament prophecies are quoted and brought into connection with the Church in our days. It may be that the Church was a mystery in the Old Testament, but here that mystery is revealed to us. We are shown in what way Old Testament and Israelite statements prove to be Church statements. According to some that is a spiritualising of prophecy. That is to say that an allegorical application (symbolic representation) is given to these Old Testament prophecies. That is indeed the case, but it also excludes that these statements can also be considered literally. In addition, the people spoken of in Romans 9 to 11 is not so much the Church, but Israel. Not the known part of Israel, the Jewish people (the two tribes), but the unknown part, namely Ephraim or Joseph, in short the ten tribes of Israel. When it is spoken of an Ammi that shall become Lo-ammi and a Lo-ammi that shall become Ammi, it concerns the Jewish people that would not be God’s people and the ten tribes, Lo-ammi, that would become Ammi. They would become that through faith and thereby we come to the Church. That does not take away the fact that the historical and legal origin of the Church lies with the ten tribes of Israel in general and apparently with Ephraim in particular.